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WHY WE LAUGH.

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WHY WE LAUGH.

By SAMUEL S. COX,

AUTHOR OF "BUCKEYE ABROAD," "EIGHT YEARS IN CONGRESS,"
"WINTER SUNBEAMS," ETC.

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PREFACE.

THE idea which prompted this volume was to string such humors as were illustrative, upon some philosophic threads, which had been floating in my mind.

Has not humor a philosophy of its own — physical, mental, and moral? It is said by Hazlitt, in his article on wit and humor, that you can not give a reason why you laugh; that people must laugh of themselves, or not at all. Without denying that we laugh with spontaneous impulse, and sometimes the more, at any restraint upon this impulse, yet the very categories of the critic himself prove that the laugh has a rational philosophy. They answer the Horatian query—"Quid Rides?"

Inquiring of one accomplished in physical science, and an expert in dissecting the parts of the human frame, he, unlike old Burton, found no melancholy in the anatomy. "What portion of the human body engages in the act of laughing?" I asked him. He responded, "No one part in particular; all parts work. Health is called hearty because it results from the combination of all parts in the laugh." True, the facial muscles play a prominent rôle; just as the face does in a man or a clock; but in the act of laughing, every part is in exer-

cise! Every fibre laughs with the human being, when he condescends to be amused. Hence, when the question, "Why do you laugh?" is asked, the answer is vain if it simply shows, as another author undertakes to show, half ironically, that we ought not to laugh at all, but that we ought only to smile.

Laughter is not sardonic. It is not from the *Herba sardonica.* That vegetable may produce a convulsive twitch. It may make involuntary contractions of the pectoral muscles and lungs; but these are not dependent on the outward sensation or the inner reflection. Hence, this sardonic philosophy properly regards the man who laughs as a fool. He is a mountebank, a clown, a simple, simpering zany. But laughter has its mental causes, and its logical and moral consequences; and to answer the question why these causes and effects exist is within the domain of an inquiry which the sages, from Aristotle to Sydney Smith, and from him of Malmesbury down to the rare critic I have quoted, have not disdained to propound.

When, therefore, in our daily routine, and in our American life; when by highway, as in the Legislature, or by by-way, as at the hearth; when in the newspaper and on the stage, in the car and in the steamer; when even in the pulpit as well as in the circus, the restless American race makes its music—facial, mental, and moral—and thus unshadows its care, and cheers its anxiety by humors so peculiar as to make a school of its own, the inquiry which has the dignity of philosophy can not be unworthy of illustration and commentary. This I propose in these

pages. The body of the suggestions, and the lights thrown upon them, are drawn from those experiences with which the writer has been most familiar.

Eliminate from the literature or conduct of any one people the amusing and amused faculty, and you produce a sterility as dull and uninteresting as the cinders and ashes of the volcanic fields of Iceland. But include the amusing element within the experiences and history of mankind, and no description of luxuriance, with grape, olive, nectarine, and orange, clustering and luscious, such as make the vales of Portugal a perennial smile, is adequate to emphasize the contrast.

A friend has raised a personal question, which may be pardonably noticed. Leigh Hunt once said that he was perplexed whether to speak of himself in the singular or plural number, whether to subject himself to the impatience of people vainer by saying "I," or to hamper himself with saying, "we were," "we would," and "we once." But resolutely, under Montaigne's advice, he concluded that he had plenty of imperfections to set off self-love; so that he courageously wrote of himself, regardless of any imputed egoism.

In this book, it is impossible not to recall the writer's experience, and to impress somewhat of his personality upon the analysis. "We" beg, however, to disavow any intention or expectation of making this subtle essence called humor. The only object is, by collation and generalization, to show the humor of classes and individuals. Should we be forbidden to do this because now and then the writer has himself been suspected, though never fairly

convicted, of a joke? Especially in the delineation and demonstration of legislative humors, in recalling those diversions of staid Solons in whose midst many years have been passed, can there be entire impersonality?

There is an account of a dramatic Mæcenas who took a steady boy from his parents, and, ignorant of any humorous or other propensity, solemnly dedicated him to the Comic Muse. The boy, however, did ripen into a capital comedian. Perhaps this was an exceptional case, for there is no special chrism whose anointing will induce the jolly genius; but a little discipline and some research may enable a serious soul to group and illustrate the humor of others.

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WHY WE LAUGH.

I.

HUMOR IN GENERAL.

"Manners with fortunes, humors turn with climes,
Tenets with books, and principles with times."—POPE.

HUMOR, in its literal meaning, is moisture. Its derived sense is different; but while it is now a less sluggish element than moisture, we still associate with humor some of its old relations. In old times, physicians reckoned several kinds of moisture in the human body—phlegm, blood, choler, and melancholy. They found one vein particularly made for a laugh to run in, the blood of which being stirred, the man laughed, even if he felt like crying, whether he would or no. Tasso describes in his serious epic, "Jerusalem Delivered," the death of the knight Ardonio, who, at the taking of Jerusalem, was slain by a Persian lance, which

"Pierced him through the vein
Where Laughter has her fountain and her seat,
So that (a dreadful bane)
He laughed for pain, and laughed himself to death."

The temper of the mind seemed to the old doctors to change as one or the other of these kinds of moisture predominated. Thus the mind received its prevailing

tone. As the current of moisture changed from time to time, humor began to mean the *present* disposition of the man. His characteristic peculiarities seemed to depend on these mercurial influences of the body; and as men never laugh at that which is common to them all, as they never raise a laugh to disparage themselves, and as they must laugh, they seized upon the oddities, whims, and the angularities of the "other man," his out-of-the-way talk and conduct, and made these human ficklenesses the sources of jocularity. So humor in our tongue reached its present signification.

It has, however, a more restricted meaning. Various definitions have been given of it. Some consider the essence of humor to be in its serio-jocoseness, as if it were a scarf of mock gravity cast over pleasantry to make it more attractive. But this can be affirmed of humor only in part.

Others confound it with wit. They define humor as the point in which pain and pleasure meet to produce a third element, which partakes of both—a sort of voluptuous torture, like being pinched by a pretty girl. Hence some humor makes us cry, and some makes us laugh. Less prettiness and more pinching bring tears; more prettiness and less pinching, smiles. It is the identity of contraries—candied ill temper, pickled good nature. They hold that contrast alone is the element of humor. This does not square with our theory. Humor has no sting. It is not poisonous, like the Stygian waters, which no other vessel but a mule's hoof could hold. The humorous man is, from his very sensibility, likely to be gentle and pathetic, but not malignant. He can rain tears as well as bring smiles. The tear, too, may have its prism of humor. But pathos has a law and an orbit

of its own, though it may often meet in conjunction with humor.

Humor lies in a forged tale; in puns and phrases; in ambiguities of sense, or affinity of sound; in humorous expression, without the humorous sense; in an odd trope; in a sly question; in a smart answer; in a quirkish reason; in a shrewd intimation; in cunning diversion, clever retort, bold speech, tart irony, lusty hyperbole, plausible reconciliation of contradictions, acute nonsense, counterfeit speech, scenic representation of persons or things, affected simplicity, presumptuous bluntness, lucky and strange hits, crafty wresting of obvious matter to the purpose, and rovings of fancy and windings of language: in fine, it breeds delight sometimes by surprises, and often by uncouthness. It is a monster for rarity, and not for beauty—a juggling trick, not for use, but for pleasure, and a seasoning spice for matters distasteful. It has an unusual and grateful tang, instilling gayety and airiness of spirit. This exhaustive exposition is from Dr. Barrow. It leaves nothing to be said. It answers—Quid Rides? Addison, in his "Genealogy of Humor," is not so comprehensive when he says that Truth is the founder of the family, and the father of Good Sense; that Good Sense fathered Wit, who married a lady of collateral line, called Mirth; by whom she had issue, Humor! These logical and fanciful definitions are more genial than the definition of Hobbes. He attributed all laughter to a sense of exulting superiority, and even pleasure in the pain of another. That sort of laughter may do for fiends, not for men.

Akin to this is the definition, that humor is the acme of wit—the point of the sword of which humor is the edge. But this is not humor as we understand it. True,

men laugh at wit as well as at humor. So they do at farce. There is much of humor in both wit and farce. They are divided from humor by no very clear lines; yet humor is neither wit nor farce. Wit cuts, humor tickles; farce grins, humor smiles. Wit is polished and sharp, an edge-tool dangerous to handle in the most practiced hands. When Jerrold heard a foolish stranger say, at dinner, "Sheep's head forever," he exclaimed, "What egotism!" This was a witty flash, and it hurt. Humor may be rusty, though never dull. While wit uses the scalpel, brings blood, divides our members, cuts out the gangrene, and oftentimes the healthy parts, humor manipulates gently, or gestures with the playful finger under the ribs of jollity, never drawing blood, but pumping up the moisture until the eyes run over with gladness. There was more humor in Jerrold than wit, when he exclaimed, as he saw a tall man dance with a short lady, "There's a mile dancing with a mile-stone!" Farce, on the other hand, is the caricature of humor. It shakes one rather roughly, disturbs the gentler currents, until they lose their lucid mirthfulness in the turbulent rush of broad guffaw.

Wit is not always a desirable quality. The worst men often use it. The devil generally monopolizes it. John Randolph had it, and used it. Voltaire, that embodied epigram, curt and unconscionable, wrote and talked in that vein. The lustre of humor never tingled in his blood, nor shed its geniality on his time. He became a thin stick of caustic, withering and blackening whatever he touched. Cervantes, however, wrote in a different vein, and made men merry at the incongruities of the Don and Sancho, while he strove to better human nature. His humor wears the sterling stamp of humanity.

Genuine humor is founded on a deep, thoughtful, and manly character. It would make men laugh more heartily, in order to make them live more happily. Wit is not careful of moral consequences. It looks only to its own brilliant flash. It admires the jewel in the hilt, and the glitter of the steel, only that they may give a glory to the stroke. Your humorless man, however witty, is not the best man. Indeed, the Italians have the same word (*tristezza*) for melancholy and malignity. Pope was witty, sad, and bad. Humor, if true, is kind and reformatory. Thackeray is wit all compact; but, unlike Pope's wit, it is relieved by lustrous fringes of humor. Dickens is humor—radiant and benevolent.

Blessed be that man or that nation, which, like Ireland, has more humor than wit; blessed if the wit be tempered with humor; blessed if that humor, like the juice of the grape, mingles with the blood, to warm the heart and generously fructify the life!

The Declaration of American Independence has been called a self-evident lie. So it is, if it is meant to declare that all men are created equal, and if by that phrase is meant equality in the endowments of mind. No axiom in Euclid is so self-evident as the diversity of men in the quality of humor alone. But whether men laugh, or whether they forbear, they are certainly equal in their right to do either. May not Mr. Glum, who wears his suit of sombre, and draws down the corners of his mouth, and opens his lachrymose sluices, and laments, like a maiden in sackcloth, "for the husband of her youth," as he walks through this vale of tears, stand upon the same equality of right as his neighbor, Mr. Glee, whose words are a squad of rattling jokes, and whose mouth is ever on the stretch with smiles, as he reads in every thing about

him glad tidings of great joy? This is what all Declarations of Independence should say. It is not true that all are created equal, in their faculties, whether of reason or of fun. All men have fun in their nature; some more than others, too much; some less than others, and too little. But there is more fun in our sourish people, and more sourness in our pleasant people, than we are apt to suppose. There is more sugar in vinegar, and more acid in cider, than we are wont to believe. Fermentation brings them out.

Humor differs only in degree, not in kind. The white man and black man both have fun in them, just as the diamond and charcoal are of the same material—carbon. In one it is crystallized and concentrated; in the other it is diffusive and combustible. Try each under the blow-pipe: the charcoal will glow with plentiful scintillations long before the diamond releases a sparkle of its light.

Efforts have been made in France, and perhaps in this country, to transmute charcoal into diamonds; but I think the result was not worth the pains and expense.

There are some phases in life which would stir humor in every man of sanity. Not that every one would laugh at the same object, but every one would laugh at some time of his life at some object. What would be a homeopathic pellet of humor to one would furnish another with a ton of fun, and *vice versâ*.

Again, the humor of men differs at different hours of the day, and at different epochs of their lives. Men are like some flowers. The common pink is blue early in the morning, and bright pink as the sun advances. Others are white in the morning, pink at noon, and red at sunset, as if they took their hues from the sun in his motions.

Moreover, what is amusing to a boy is puerile to a man, and what is painful to a boy may be pleasant to a man. Who does not remember that nothing was so dreaded by him at school as to be punished by sitting between two girls? But ah! the force of habit and the lapse of time! In after-years we learn to submit to it without shedding a tear!

These varieties must be so from the variety of human vicissitude. An Englishman laughs at the untoward effort of a Frenchman to speak English, though a Frenchman would not laugh at John Bull's awkwardness at French; yet Johnny Crapaud never laughs more than at an Englishman's surly airs of assumed consequence. An African bursts into irrepressible glee at the faintest approach of the ludicrous, as if his mind had but one side, and it were all smitten and quivering with jollity; yet the grave Spaniard, his master, composedly smokes his cigarette and twirls his mustache, utterly impervious to the stroke. The one, like jelly, shakes with every motion around; the other is frigid, like ice, and thaws with a cold trickle of pleasure.

This diversity in humor is independent of education. It is not superficial either. No outside show can hide it. The spiritual tentacula are always vital and vibratory in some; ever dormant, if not dead, in others. Some would have a perpetual jubilee of life; their muscles are ever ready to relax at the absurdities of others; they have amusing scouts and sentries ever on the alert to catch fun; while others are so indifferent that it seems as if nature were shrouded at their birth. Observe these two men on the cars. They buy *Harper's Magazine*. The one begins with the Scientific article, the other begins at the "Drawer end," and reads, like a Hebrew, backward.

Shall we say, then, that there is no law for humor? Like the comet or the cholera, it comes — God only knows whence — and its very orbit is an eccentricity. It is very often humor only because it is exceptional. Queerness is the badge of its genuineness. Undertake to bring it into orbits, measure it by geometry, test it by equations, appreciate it by figures, or square it with roots and logic, and it is off! Its law is to have no well-defined code, and all attempts to philosophize about its essence were as well omitted. We know that *it is*, that it is different in different minds; but why, it is beyond philosophy to tell.

"Fat men are always humorous," says one who has a theory, and Falstaff is introduced as the illustration. The analogies of nature are pressed into the service of this oleaginous theory. Tom Hood is quoted where he says of the Australian soil that "it is so fat that, tickle it with a hoe, and it will laugh with a harvest." But fun and fat do not necessarily go together. Moisture of the muscles and layers of lard have no more to do with humor than meat has with manhood. Little Dr. Holmes would show you that by one turn of his "tread-mill." The beasts which feed most are the dullest. We must reject, then, the adipose theory. If we are to judge of a man's jollity by the juiciness of his body, one would think an American to be the jolliest of mortals, for his salivary glands are in perpetual flux.

"Laziness begets laughter," says another theorist. Industrious people are too earnest and serious for jokes. Leisure leads to levity, and a nation that is always bending its sinews to labor can not unbend them to laugh. This is measurably true, but it will not hold as a general rule. There is something more radical, something

too evanescent for apprehension, which determines the humorous temper of the mind. All that we can say is, that physical influences may, and do, modify its development; but the germinal principle in every man is different. What Mozart said of himself and his composing will illustrate what is meant: "I do not know in what my originality consists. Why my productions take that particular form or style which makes them Mozartish is probably owing to the same cause which makes my nose thus and so—makes it, in short, Mozart's nose.

COSMOPOLITAN HUMOR.

But as the people of one country may be alike even in their differences of body and mind, so there are peculiarities in the humor of different nations as marked as the geographical peculiarities of their country, or as their food. An Englishman loves roast beef; a German, sourkrout; a Patagonian, red mud; a Kamtchatkan, blubber; a South Sea Islander, cold clergyman; a Peruvian Indian, the abominable chica; and the American, the weed! Their humorous taste is not less diverse.

To the eye of a comprehensive philosophy every thing is laughable, ludicrous, or ridiculous except that which is the proper attribute and investment of an honest heart and a pure soul. It was long ago said by Coleridge that whatever must be misrepresented in order to be ridiculed is not ridiculed in fact, but the thing substituted for it. It is a satire on something else, coupled with a lie on the part of the satirist. If, however, the lie is excessively great, and the intent to deceive is playful and apparent, there is humor. The more incredible the story, the greater the fun. There may be an honest hyperbole and a sincere mockery of heroism.

Sir Thomas More, in his ideal commonwealth, says that when the foreign embassadors came into Utopia, and found that their gold, gems, and finery produced nothing but laughter, they were amazed. And if we ever have a perfect Utopian society, such amazement will salute every such mere ostentatious adornment. I never doubted the story of an emperor of Japan who died of immoderate laughter when told that the Americans governed themselves without a king, for, at that time, to the Japanese sense of humor perhaps no more comical idea was entertainable. Indeed, it has sometimes become farcical to elector and elected, successful and defeated, in this country.

It is alleged that some nations have little or no humor, as the Dutch and Scotch. The solidity of the Dutch prevents a joke from getting through their sevenfold pile of clothing and flesh. As prone as we are in America to divide into parties and sects on every issue, we could never have divided on such a question as divided Holland and Zealand for two centuries. Their whole population were arrayed one against the other in a dispute which arose between two persons at a feast. The Hocks maintained one side, the Kaalbejanoos the other. The agitation grew to such a pitch that the nobles and towns took sides. Each were ready to die for their colors, though the world was ready to die laughing at their dullness: and the vexed question was, whether the cod-fish took the hook, or the hook took the cod-fish.

As to the Scotch, notwithstanding the humor of Burns, Smollett, and Scott, yet I think that Sydney Smith was not far from the truth when he said that it required a surgical operation to get a joke into a Scotch understanding. Indeed, the same idea is conveyed in some of Black's recent Scottish novels.

I am not, however, prepared to agree that their only idea of humor is infinitely distressing, inasmuch as it consists in immoderately laughing at stated, or what may be called geometrical, intervals. If the Scotch were not so "canny," they might be more comically inclined. It would not then require the point of a gimlet to reach the objective point. The possession of keenness and intelligence, and their constant use, render them too serious to jest. They want the ardor and impulses which the Irish have in abundance, and which give to them an unresisting flow of mirth. Ireland makes up for her want of practical sagacity by the wit of her writers, the readiness of her repartees, and the drollery of her bulls. Macaulay hit the white when he said that Ireland was more interesting than prosperous.

Art is cosmopolitan. Painting, sculpture, and eloquence—all forms of literature and expression—are possible to each nation. There is, however, something about humor unmistakably national as well as periodical. It is said that no one but an Englishman—nay, no one but Douglas Jerrold—could have made his wit, any more than any one else but Hood could have made Hood's puns. "It is better to be witty and wise, than witty and otherwise," is a witticism of the Anglo-Jerrold type; while no one but Hood could have fancied the Mrs. F., who was so very deaf that she might have worn a percussion-cap, and been knocked on the head, without hearing it snap; and whose ear-trumpet was so wonderful that she heard from her husband at Botany Bay! It was a pleasing exaggeration of Charles Lamb to pity that solemn English ancestry who lived before candles were common, and who, when a joke was cracked in the dark, had to feel around for the smile. Could any one but an American

make Shakspeare a "boss poet?" or add to Thackeray's remark about the baby size of an oyster—that he had eaten one so large that it took three men to swallow it whole?

The national paternity of these bits of fun is as clearly traceable as a bull would be to Ireland. "Where," exclaimed a Hibernian, "will you find a modern building which has lasted as long as the ancient ones?" "They never could be forgotten," said De Quincey, "for no man had ever remembered them." This was the logic of the intellectual man, incapable of making the Celtic phrase.

Humor changes with different eras. It is as impossible to make Cervantes and "Hudibras" popular nowadays as to make *Punch* American, or President Lincoln amusing to a Laplander. Paris laughs perpetually at *Charivari;* but no cacographic wit could make Billings acceptable to a *café chantant.* Artemus Ward pleased the English; but is he not exceptional? The native roughness of his style was wonderfully rounded and polished by a sense as universal as that of Rabelais. As a Louisville friend has said, "We have a humor racy of the soil, quaint and characteristic, very primitive and provincial, and more independent of classic inspiration and foreign models than any of our contemporaries!" Quoting Pope, however, he still confesses that humor is like our watches: none go just alike, yet each believes his own.

Unmistakable in its refinement was the wit of Charles O'Conor once, in answer to Judge Henry E. Davies: "It is difficult," said the latter, "to do justice to more than one side." Response from the American Celt—to wit: "Your infernal ingenuity makes it often certain that you do injustice to both sides." Sheridan's memory for jests,

and imagination for facts, were not less accurate and acute, as tests of the national sheath in which his dirk of wit was incased. I knew a Western lawyer, of the Hardin-Corwin type, whose fun colors Lethe with sunshine. It would not allow him even to indulge in the ordinary fictions of an ejectment. It was not John Doe or Richard Roe, but Timothy Peaceable, on the demise of his client, *v.* Thomas Troublesome, tenant in possession, on whom a humorous notice was served.

HUMOROUS NATIONAL PECULIARITIES.

The mode of courting and marrying is as various among different nations as it is humorous. In some countries the woman has a sham-fight before she succumbs to the pertinacious suitor. In ancient Sparta and Rome, the bride had to be lifted across the marital threshold. Among the people of Khoond, in India, the Kalmucks, the Kirghis, and the Nogay Tartars, the young women, while they are really acquiescent, demonstrate a reluctance to be won by no means debonair or coy. Among the Bedouins of Mount Sinai, the girl gets ready for a battle when her expected bridegroom approaches. She will fight with tooth and nail. In other countries this custom is more serious, and occurs after marriage. In Thibet, the bride straddles a horse, and there is a race for the altar, or, rather, from it. The best man wins.

> "Was ever woman in this humor woo'd?
> Was ever woman in this humor won?"

This pleasing recreation is called *kalbwi.* It is a word in several tongues, and indicates some relation to maidenhood or affection. The Norsemen and Frisians had a similar way of wooing and winning. It was called

quan-fang, or "woman-catching." Many humors, in addressing the elect, or proposing, are related in verse and prose. New England, in the last century, if not in this, has given us many quaint, if not funny, descriptions. The stage, from the "Elder Brother" of Beaumont and Fletcher down to the last novelty of the "Mighty Dollar," presents the comic embarrassments of courting; and this has generally consisted not so much in endurance on horseback, or main strength, as in absolute awkwardness, or *gaucherie*.

All customs that are novel have a humorous aspect. Not only is the susceptibility to humor different among different nations, but the humorous objects differ by reason of different customs and habits. There is nothing very laughable to us in the manner in which we at our hotels and railroad dépôts gobble down our food; but even an Arab or a Chinese would laugh at it, if we did not. Yet it is ludicrous to us to see an Arab lady pick out the choice tidbits with which you had loaded your plate, or roll a little ball of hash in her dainty fingers, and, by way of especially honoring you, plug your mouth with it unexpectedly; or to see a Chinese with his chopsticks load himself up with boiled rice, and ram it down as we would a wad in a gun! It is said that the ladies under the dominion of the Grand Lama, when good-looking, disfigure their faces to preserve them from vanity. I have never seen that recorded of our ladies—Heaven forbid! The idea, however, is as ludicrous as the Tartar custom of pulling a man by the ear when they want him to drink, and keeping pulling till he opens his mouth, when they pour down the liquor. I know a man whose ears do not require to be pulled!

There is nothing very laughable to an American in the

shaking of hands, which is everywhere practiced in our country; but foreigners do find in it much amusement. Yet nothing will be more ridiculous to us than the salutation in Germany, where one may see two big, burly, hairy men rush to each other's embrace and kiss with schoolgirl fervency. The people of Thibet salute by lolling out the tongue and scratching the right ear, and the Esquimaux by rubbing their noses with their thumb and describing a conic section in the air with their fingers—a custom once practiced by mischievous urchins in our land, but not exactly as a salutatory grace. It is now, happily, honored in the breach. In Turkey an American traveling with his *un*veiled wife, even without the appendages, so usual here, of six small children and seven large trunks and bandboxes, is to the Turk in a funny predicament. On the other hand, what would be funny with us, among the Turks is quite the reverse. An American gives us an instance in his experience in Syria. He was about to mount his mule amidst a crowd of Oriental visitors, and wished to give them an exaggerated idea of American agility. He jumped a little too far, and overshot the mark, coming down on the other side like a diver, with his hands and nose in the mud, his feet caught in the saddle, and his coat-skirts cleverly rolled over his head to screen him from what he supposed was a laughing crowd. Yet not a soul smiled, not a sound was heard, save a tender grunt of sympathy and demure offers of aid. Now, a Turk in America, with baggy breeches and turbaned head, taking a leap over a mule in the streets of an American city, and getting stuck upside down, with his proboscis in a rut and his heels in the saddle, would be saluted with something more than a grunt of sympathy and demure offers of aid. We have

more humor than dignity; the Turks more dignity than humor.

How different the effect of another attempt to ride, as described by Meacham, of Modoc fame! The cayuse is saddled, and held by a long rope. A lawyer of La Grange mounts. He is spurred. The first touch of the rowel into the pony's side starts horse and rider to the end of the rope. The horse then suddenly stops. The rider suddenly does not. Half the town are jubilantly interested in these proceedings; and all the action taken by the lawyer is simply vigorous expression, neither Blackstonian nor Biblical, but "detached words put strangely in shape for immediate use." Is this humor of the Pacific peculiar? Certainly, it is not tender or respectful. It has no moral phase. It is not like the sweet truth taught by Spenser as to the mud-bedraggled knight: "Entire affection hateth nicer hands." But it feeds a voracious, though unreasoning, person—whenever the Anglo-American is hungry for fun. And is he not always greedy for such scenes? When the great canon of wit, Sydney Smith, pictures to us an analogous scene, two continents laugh, though Asia be imperturbably serene. He fancied a corpulent and respectable tradesman, decorated with the ostentatious habiliment of a pea-green coat, sliding down gently into the mud! He asks: "Would we laugh?" Yes. *Quid rides?* Why such barbarous hilarity? And then if the tradesman fell into a violent passion; and if he abused the passers-by; if he threatened them—would the gayety of the tunic, the corpulency of the tradesman, his respectability and harmless anger, and the rills of muddy water down his piteous face—would these restrain the boisterous cachinnations of the multitude? Our great comedian, Burton, answers

for us: "Certainly, we would laugh." The ludicrous surprise would make us laugh; because the effects of the accident furnish the food of fun for the famishing soul.

There never was an American who would not sacrifice his courtesy and sympathy to his fun. He must have it, however, well seasoned, and done in a hurry, and its prevailing characteristic must be exaggeration. This was illustrated even in the inordinate hopes of so calm and sedate a statesman as Mr. Seward, as to the closing-up of our late civil war in sixty days. That was the huge joke of our time. There was a court in General Grant's army which sentenced a man to work ten years on General Butler's Dutch Gap Canal; and it was generally said, if not believed, in the army that Palmer, who made the patented limbs, had purchased two thousand acres of Western land, and planted them with locust and maple, with a view to economize in the future in his manufacture of arms and legs.

I have dwelt thus elaborately on the philosophy of abstract humor, and the peculiarly humorous qualities of various nations, because we possess the exaggerations of all other countries, and because the quality of our humor is the result of our mosaic nationality. And our Anglo-Saxon brothers are like us. When repulsed at the Redan, and driven by the Russian bayonet helter-skelter, head over heels, into the trenches of the Crimea, they are reported to have tumbled in, even over the mangled and the dead, amidst roars of laughter.

Nations, then, have their peculiar humor, differing in degree. Some have undertaken to say just what quality pertains to the humor of different nations. It is said that French humor is that of the passions; English, of the interests and social relations; German, of the abstract;

Italian, of the artistic; Spanish, of the romantic and fanciful; Arabian, of the moral; and American, of the pure comical intention—a slashing humor, which will sacrifice feeling, interest, sociality, philosophy, romance, art, and morality for its joke; an overriding, towering humor, that will one day make fun of all the rest of the world, not forgetting itself. But these distinctions are at best but arbitrary. They may indicate the main feature of the national humor, but they are in that as likely to be wrong as right, inasmuch as these distinctions themselves are made by men of different susceptibilities. The French have little humor either in their literature or character. The exaggerations of Rabelais, the comedy of Molière, and the questionable *naïveté* of Montaigne are but exceptions. Wit in all its brilliancy they have. Their dandyism, finicalness, and fastidiousness do not sympathize heartily with the broad irony, full feeling, and strong sense which lie at the basis of humor. Genteel comedy, *opéra bouffe*, and farce they have; but where in all France are the bodies and souls which people the papers of Pickwick and hover around the canvas of Hogarth? Their humor, like their soup, is made out of bones, and *maigre* at that. It lacks fibre and body.

Spanish humor has long since been obsolete. Hidalgo pomposity freezes fun. Once or twice I heard General Prim bring down a laugh in the Spanish Cortes by quoting a saying of Sancho Panza. But General Butler's dash and roar would not be possible in such a body; for humor seldom goes in state, has no splendid shows, and boasts no grandee pedigree. It is one of the prerogatives of the fierce democracy and victorious republican, and has the right divine for its sanction. It disdains hauteur and pride. The American finds in the preten-

sions of others, even among themselves, "a thing for laughter, leers, fleers, and jeers." As sings Saxe, our most classical wag:

> "Depend upon it, my snobbish friend,
> Your family thread you can't ascend,
> Without good reason to apprehend
> You may find it *waxed* at the further end
> By some plebeian vocation;
> Or, worse than that, your boasted line
> May end in a loop of stronger twine
> That plagued some worthy relation."

What a reservoir of humor, therefore, to an American, should "Don Quixote" be, which takes off and down the grandiose chivalric hidalgo! Is it not wonderful that it is not more read in this country? It is the very essence of exaggeration. Germany, in her paintings, her poetry, her prose, her social gatherings, her vine-feasts, and holidays—how rich and varied is her humor! Whether it be Peter Schlemihl, whose shadow froze to an iceberg, or the metamorphoses of Mephistopheles, Germany is ever facetious and *riant*. With her, Mischief himself is welcome, if he play Momus. There is no smack of fun in all Fatherland that has not some spice of deviltry in its cup. Even the "mysteries" of the Middle Ages were possessed of a devil.

Italy has had little humor, and what she has is rather buffoonery, the product of a soil just reblooming with its elder culture. Humor likes free soil, full play, no formality, no starch and buckram. Hence it has always, from the time of Shakspeare and his Dogberry to the time of Hood and his Kilmansegg, thriven on English soil, and, *a fortiori*, will thrive on American soil still more exuberantly, where all the several humors of the nations com-

mingle in the oddest unreserve, and with the most imperturbable extravagance.

"The prosperity of a jest lies in the ear of him that hears it," said the master of wit. The ear may be a large one. It may be as comprehensive as that of an Illinois prairie; but the crop must be sown in the ground, and not remain in the hand of the sower. I have a picture in my house. It is Molière reading his "Tartuffe" to his servant. The artist is an Italian, Gatti; but the idea is universal. The playwright tests his humor, as all spoken humor must be tested. Its "prosperity" was in the mirthful sense of his elderly servant. Please observe this picture! Molière's right hand clasps the manuscript. His left points downward, with an index-finger (whose neighbor wears a gem) to an unmistakable class —the targets of his satiric fancy. A full brown wig curls down his shoulders, and makes him seem like a comic Blackstone. His abundant neckerchiefs, frilled and ruffed, are set within his velvety, puffy, pocketed doublet; while he stands in the light from the casement, in front of his damask chair, and under the damask hangings; and she, almost in Quaker garb, leans forward, with knit brow, one half of her mouth in laugh, the other in sedate criticism; a red cap surmounting her gray hair, and the bravery of it all in the intense critical and comic slyness which peeps out of her blue eye. There is no boisterous laugh, no sardonic convulsion, no involuntary spasm, but the pure, intelligent, comic intention, asquint and radiant in her face which copies his; while around the author lies, in the confusion of successful production, the "prosperity" which comes of true humor in the ear of the hearer. There is a page of abandoned manuscript upon every touch of tracery on

the rug on which he stands; and a whole library of fun, still unbound and unexpressed, in the hand, gesture, mien, costume, and imagery of the great comic dramatist of his time, Jean Baptiste Poquelin, ever known as Molière. Two hundred years and more have gone since he was saluted, for his *précieuses ridicules*, with the cry of "*Courage! voilà la vraie comédie!*" But the public and posterity have confirmed the judgment, and no one now studies Plautus and Terence, but the ear of the world, for the prosperity of true humor. What, then, has the American ear to hear?

II.

AMERICAN HUMOR IN PARTICULAR.

"Those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labor to cull out and sort asunder, were not more intermixed."—JOHN MILTON.

WHAT, then, is the quality of American humor? How much of the electric talent do we possess?

As to the last inquiry, there are many reasons which might be urged, *a priori*, why we should be wanting in its finer development. We are too engrossed in practical matters, our eyes too much bent on the golden pavement, to cultivate that hilarious spirit which is the offspring of leisure, laziness, fatness, freedom, carelessness, and unrestraint. We shall see by-and-by how much force there is in this antecedent probability against our humor.

It is urged as a reason against our having the humorous gift that, as humor flows out of peculiarities of character and conduct, we can not have a national humor original and unique because of our cosmopolitanism; that if we have any humor, it will so partake of the quality of every other people as to be wanting in a distinct American quality.

This objection is worth examining. Let me give it the strongest statement. In illustration of it, the objector points to the richness of English humor; and triumphantly asks, "Is it not due as much, if not more, to

English isolation than to the unequalness of the climate? Do not England's insular position and crabbed exclusiveness give her a mold of her own, so that an Englishman can never be mistaken for any one else, either in a play, at home, or abroad? Is not this, in connection with the changes of English climate, that which makes the Englishman such an incarnate incongruity? and is not this near a definition of humor? How, then, can America, with her roving disposition, her open ports, and her armies of immigration, ever attain that distinct form of manners which England in her isolation has attained?"

Let us weigh this statement. It is true that no people were ever so composite as ours. On the Atlantic side the nations of all Europe have a theatre for the blending of their divers tempers, while on the Pacific side the Chinaman and Japanese, with their pig-tails and shorn crowns, lean forward to blend their laughterless physiognomy with the motley groups which people the *placers*, do the cooking and washing, and build the railroads of the Occident. It was only the other evening the writer addressed a meeting in New York City. It was composed of Hungarian Hebrews. They drank lager, while the band played "The Mulligan Guards." It was more than *E pluribus bragh, Erin go unum!*

Our institutions have made us the most affiliative people known to history. It may be that, in grafting so many and divers shoots upon our national stock, we are overburdening our productive energy, and neutralizing our native temper and tone. But I trust not. The predominant genius is *American!* Like the genius of the Grecian artist, it is eclectic, for out of many models it will educe the highest type, from divers discordances it

will develop a comely concordance. Bancroft has said that our land was not more the recipient of the men of all countries than of their ideas. Annihilate the past of any one leading nation of the world, and our destiny would have been changed. Italy and Spain, in the persons of Isabella and Columbus, joined together for the great discovery that opened it for emigration and commerce; France contributed to its independence; the search for the origin of the language we speak carries us to India; our religions are from Palestine; of the hymns sung in our churches, some were first heard in Italy, some in the deserts of Arabia, some on the banks of the Euphrates; our arts come from Greece, our jurisprudence from Rome, our maritime code from Russia; England taught us the system of common law, and Ireland the heart to love and defend the constitution of our federation; the noble republic of the United Provinces bequeathed to us the prolific principle of federal union. Our country stands, therefore, more than any other, as the realization of the unity of the race. It may be asked, "Where, then, in all this Babel of tongues, jangle of ideas, crosses of race, and confusion of systems, is there any individual Americanism in our temper, tone, or humor?" Where, indeed, I answer, if not in the blending of the many-tinted phases of the varied civilizations which time and sacrifices have furnished for our own exquisite mosaic? It is this absorption of characteristics of every clime and time which makes our society the most incongruous, grotesque, odd, angular, and *outré*, ever yet known in history. Instead of destroying our peculiar humor, this medley has turned us from the old English channel, where we had ever been copyists, into new channels of our own. Jefferson, in his Rip Van Winkle, could

never have played his part so well had he not combined the thin, jolly American with the Dutchman. Instead of this unexclusiveness breaking down our humor, it is a resource for it as inexhaustible as it is varied. If the power of man consists in the multitude of his affinities, in the fact that his life is intertwined more with his fellows of every caste, degree, and nation—if he thus becomes a more complete compend of all time, with all its tastes, affections, whims, and humors—then the American man ought to be more potent in his individuality than any other. From *his* mind, as from the Forum of ancient Rome, proceed the great avenues north, south, east, and west, to the heart of every other people, multiplying his relations, and drawing to itself all the resources which human nature can furnish. Out of these derivatives from the Old World we have our originals. The greater the variety of our life, the more golden are the veins of that humor which is so loud, large, uproarious, and rollicking in exaggerations.

PROSPERITY, LIBERTY, AND HUMOR.

There are elements in our country from which, *a priori*, we may infer that we shall have abundant harvests of humor, if we have them not already. These elements are our Plenty and Freedom. The same reasons given by an old English writer for the variety of the vein in England may be applied to America with even more fitness. I extract their essence thus: 1. The native plenty of the soil: plenty begets wantonness and pride; wantonness is apt to invent, and pride scorns to imitate. 2. Easy government, and liberty of professing opinions: liberty with plenty begets stomach and heart, and stomach will not be restrained. Thus we come to have more that ap-

pear what they are. We have more humor, because every man follows his own bent, and takes both pleasure and pride in showing it.

This philosophy will hold everywhere. Plenty, unless gorged to dyspepsia—and even then it becomes ludicrous—is the very father of fun. Whether plenty has the ribless side or the thin anatomy, laughter lives in its company. Does not a man "well-to-do" feel good? Is he not more genial? Can he not laugh more heartily, invent merrier thoughts? And will he not, if unconstrained by a tyrannic government, let out more of the native peculiarities of his disposition? His independence precludes imitation, and disdains obedience. He is more of an individual sovereign, and in the wrestling of life he will show more muscle and point. Nast's caricatures furnish plentiful illustrations, and the newspapers, in both picture and type, are not less evidences of our unlicensed printing than of our love of the most grotesque fun. If you would deaden humor, put your government to work with the Procrustean bed, and make men all of a length, and you have machines, not men, and no humor.

There is but one exception to the rule, and that is the Irish. Rich or poor, full or pinched, they must have their jollity. And yet Disraeli called them a melancholy people! Well do I remember the sparkles of merriment let off by the little urchins who ran after the jaunting-car to Donnybrook Fair. They begged, to be sure, and looked wretched, but they won more pennies by their humor than by their looks. All through Ireland, even in their extremities of want, the goodness of Nature seems to have provided them with cheer as an offset to their hard condition. They do not need their fun so much in this land of plenty, but it does not leave them here.

Our people are on a full rush for plenty, but they have their fun as they go. The very rush makes merriment. The excitement throws off electric sparks. The friction makes music. We have been waxing too rich and fat without fair distribution. Since A.D. 1800, the rich are ten times richer, and the poor ten times poorer. Our cities show it more than the country. At least, we are growing rich in spots. Our watering-places, our hotels, our theatres, our churches, our lectures, our literature, the amenities and luxuries of life, all float on this golden Pactolus; and along with them are the laughing *genii* who puncture the follies and hold the mirror up to the oddities and fooleries that bubble and effervesce in the wake of this very successful life. Rev. Cream Cheese preaches quite *recherché*, and fashionable religion with lavendered *mouchoir*, wipes away the tears that never flow; but Curtis, the rogue, sits demurely by, and Mrs. Potiphar goes to his canvas, illustrated by his facile humor. *Parvenu* pride turns up its aristocratic nose at plebeian vocations; but Saxe, the wag, is sliding the genealogical line of the M'Brides through his fingers, and holds up the waxed end with a chuckle. Sanctimonious humanity becomes a Federal Senator. His name is Dillworthy. He promises his constituency immense material advantages on the philanthropic basis; while his friend and admirer, Colonel Mulberry Sellers, warm and genial, eloquent and sanguine, impecunious in purse but a millionaire in promises, rallies to the theatre thousands nightly to roar in laughter over the exaggeration of an extravagant feature in our American society. The genius of Mark Twain in facile caricature proves that there are not only "millions" in a play, but that millions will laugh it into every man's conversation and approval.

It is not limited to the melodrama. Our extravagance as to the *opéra bouffe*, and even as to the regular opera, outdoes France or Italy. How often do we see our fashionable people, themselves the result of our extravagant tastes and social ambitions, and, utterly innocent of Italian or French, affect to die away in its rich and fluent cadences, or shiver with excitement at the frenzy of a Rachel or a Ristori! But the lorgnette of humor is leveled at them, and their photographs are soon caught by the sunbeams of some satiric fancy.

OUR HUMOROUS WRITERS.

There is much of Franklin's shrewd, practical humor disguised under the mask of Josh Billings's sayings. With a Puritan face all severe and sour; without a hearty open laugh to welcome the coming or speed the parting joke; with nothing but an odd pucker of the mouth, and an elfish twinkle of the eye; with an inward chuckle which has no outward sign—Billings (aside from the small fun of bad orthography) hits the target of humor in the centre when he says that with some people who brag of ancestry, their great trouble is their great descent; or when he thanks God for allowing fools to live, that wise men may get a living out of them; when he says that wealth won't make a man virtuous, but that there ain't any body who wants to be poor just for the purpose of being good; when he says that if a fellow gets to going down hill, it seems as if every thing were greased for the occasion; or when he gives us his way of keeping a mule in a pasture, by turning it into a meadow adjacent and letting it jump out; or when he has known mules, like men, keep good for six months just to get a good kick at somebody —he makes a species of drollery which even our English

reviewers have begun to appreciate, and which does not require the drawl of bad grammar and worse spelling. I once had occasion, in a deliberative body, to use Billings's illustration that one hornet, if he felt well, could break up a camp-meeting. The effect amazed me. The application was made; and Billings himself afterward said, "My name will go down to the fewter coupled with the hornet; we will be twins in posterity." The description of the nature of the insect, especially the use it makes of its "business end," of the way it avoids the thousand attempts to "shoo" it and to fight it, and the consequent consternation of a pious body, has in it exaggeration of the raciest kind.

But this kind of humor, like that of Nasby, does not rise to the dignity of literature. It can not compare, of course, with Washington Irving, who, in his *Knickerbocker* and other works, has given us the very choicest brand, all sparkling and stimulating. But Irving is too refined, sweet, and shy for general appreciation. Besides, Irving is not an American humorist. He is more English than American, more cosmopolitan than either. Paulding, Hawthorne—alas for our humorous literature! Oh for one man for America what Richter is to Germany, or Dickens is to England!

Mrs. Stowe has plenty of the genuine indigenous humor in her "Uncle Tom." But can there be a more gentle and genuine humor than that of Mrs. Sparrowgrass and her "cozzens?"

Our humorous writers, with a few exceptions, are not strictly national. Even Franklin, our first, best humorist, stifled his humor in the Addisonian style. His was too earnest a character to make the humorous trait very prominent; but his sly, shining threads of observation, in-

tertwisted into the strong strand of his practical sense, have had their effect on the older men of this generation.

Sam Slick and Jack Downing—they are the caricature of caricatures. We have had printed at Philadelphia a series of works on American humor, giving graphic pictures of the pioneer times of the South, South-west, and West, which, if purged of their grossness, and artistically inwoven with some genial purpose, would better represent our national idiosyncrasies, with their reckless heroism, quaint extravagances, and novel parlance, than any other portion of our literature.

But, after all, the American humor does not reside altogether in books. It is to be found in our newspapers, with their spicy dialogues, practical jokes, Mrs. Partingtonisms, Artemus Wards, Josh Billingses, Nasbys, Max Adelers, Twains, Bret Hartes, and the infinity of little jets of fun on the outside, and measureless ridicule and cuts on the inside, local items, advertisements, and all.

There is no room in this volume to run the round of our newspaper humorists. One might begin with Doesticks, quote Breitmann's Anglo-German verses, turn over the versatilities of Mr. Newell, chuckle at Max Adeler's demure extravaganzas, Apoth. E. Cary's humorous nostrums, and the dry jocoseness of the *Danbury News*, roar with Donn Piatt till the Capitol itself echoed the "cave of the winds," or shake with the "Fat Contributor" until the lean earth was larded, and just begin to have an appreciation of the illimitably broad hyperbole which marks our ephemeral newspaper fun.

The Athenians frequented the theatre of Bacchus to hear a play of Aristophanes, wherein the spite and fun of the day were concentrated; the Romans gathered at the Baths of Caracalla to laugh over the gossip and hu-

mor of the city. What theatre and bath were to Athens and Rome, the journal is to the American. In our five thousand American journals, sending out a billion of copies per annum, the American finds a mirror of his own nature, reflecting his opinions and feelings, and those distorted and grotesque images and scenes which are the life of American humor.

OUR HUMOROUS SPEAKERS.

All of our prominent men—John P. Hale, ever on a smile with his waggery; General Houston, with his eccentricity; John Van Buren, with his playful sarcasm; Daniel S. Dickinson, with his trenchant, Scriptural, practical, ironical hits; Thomas Corwin, with his inimitable drollery; Thaddeus Stevens, with his dry and biting sarcasm; General Nye, with his full exchequer of anecdote; and Proctor Knott, with his elaborate Dulúthiana—had the charm which drew the crowd, and held men while they talked. The masses leap to hear a man of humor like Butler, even when his speeches are full charged with diabolism, or to hear a minister like Beecher, and even from the pulpit await the inevitable laugh! It is all the better if it have point; but give the laugh without point, rather than no laugh at all. There is no *ruse* so common as this, at least in the West—as the *argumentum ad risum*. Turn the laugh on your opponent, Sir Sophist, and though he pile Pelion on Ossa of argument, you have him down! This may seem more creditable to our humor than to our sense. But let us see. One of the utilities of humor is the use made of it by our writers and speakers in what is called the *reductio ad absurdum*. This use may be abused; but we can not spare it, for all that, so long as we have empirics in medicine, pettifog-

gers in law, demagogues in politics, pretenders in religion, and snobs in society. Our institutions are favorable to the growth of mushrooms. They grow up in a night around the roots of our wide-spreading freedom. We have theorists without sagacity, philanthropists without morality, and practical men without sentiment. We have men who pass current for eagles, which a little touch from the point of humor reduces to tomtits. We have vaunting patriots whose patriotism, as of old, is scoundrelism—men who live, ay, who thrive, on the burning indignation that is poured upon them. Such men wither, under ridicule, to their proper dimensions. Ridicule never hurts an honest man. He alone can join in the laugh against himself. It is the Ithuriel spear, however, which makes the devil show himself as he is. Ridicule may not be a good test of truth, as Shaftesbury maintained, but it is not a bad test of falsehood. An old English poet says:

> "For he who does not tremble at the sword,
> Who quails not with his head upon the block,
> Turn but a jest against him, loses heart:
> The shafts of wit slip through the stoutest mail;
> There is no man alive who can live down
> The unextinguishable laughter of mankind."

We are apt to condemn the writer or speaker who applies the touch-stone of absurdity to the shams and rascality of the day, even while we laugh with him. But Attic salt is as useful as Kanawha. The one preserves mess pork, the other moral purity. Even when our humor is misapplied, it is the smoke evidencing the fire of fun which lies beneath the crust of our society. Hence the success of Nast and others with their terrible caricatures.

The general sources of our humor are those from which all people draw, which would make a Laplander laugh as

well as an American. These have been frequently catalogued. They are a portion of the categories to which reference has been made. Let us reproduce a few. The balking of our hopes in trifling matters makes us smile. An unlooked-for accident that is absurd, as when a dandy slips up on an icy pavement, makes us laugh. We laugh at that which is against custom, as at a man in a bonnet. We laugh at the weaknesses of others, as at a politician who brags much and polls a small vote. We laugh at amateur farmers who fail. We laugh at incongruities, as when we see a little man walking arm-in-arm with a giant; we laugh more if the little man marches with a big bass drum and the big man with a baby drum. We laugh at a little man on tiptoes, thrumming a base viol. We laugh at insignificant distress, as at a lady who loses her lap-dog. We laugh at extravagant pretension which suddenly collapses, as at an orator who soars to a star-lofty climax and breaks down. We laugh at cool impudence, for the ready and courageous invention pleases. We laugh when it is foiled, as at a lawyer in court who gets a saucy cut from a female witness. We laugh at a sudden or stealthy surprise, as at the large stranger who kicked an ornamental dog on the steps of a brown-stone house, merely to see if it was "holler." He is said to be at his aunt's, ill, but he is not over his surprise. Young ladies laugh at young men—and that is queer: they can not tell why; but oftentimes the more they like them, the more they laugh at and smile on them. We laugh at what is serious for others, as at a man looking out of a jail, but never at what seriously affects us, as, for example, if we were in jail. We laugh at disguises, at the dress of foreigners, fops, and slovens. We laugh when we see some men in a clean collar and new coat. We laugh at the

meeting of extremes, as at the two well-bred fellows who, being pretty thoroughly soaked with bad whisky, got into the gutter, and, after floundering for some time, one of them proudly said, "Let's go to another hotel; this hotel leaks." It is hard to keep children from laughing at deformity, at negroes, at madmen, at fat men, at long thin men. We laugh often because we ought not to, as in church, from the spontaneous impulse of resistance to sobriety. We laugh at the utter simplicity of some men, and the more so if the laugh is caused by a sudden illustration of it, or by a sudden jerk of the mind to an absurd extreme, as the other day, when an editor, describing the gifted Dr. Holland, said that he would loan money to a man on the collateral notes of an accordion. We laugh —all men laugh, but Americans especially—at the aggrandizement of special foibles of character. Dickens furnishes illustrations of how humorous some pre-eminent trait may be made to seem by a sort of Hogarthian satire with the false perspective. But this exaggeration is not always humorous.

OUR SPECIFIC HUMORS.

But we have in America specific objects of humor—the scheming Yankee, the big, bragging, brave Kentuckian, and the first-family Virginian. We have lawyers on the circuit, as in the Georgia scenes; loafers on a spree, as in Neal's charcoal sketches; politicians in caucus; legislators in session; travelers on cars and steamers; indeed, the history of every American's life is humorous, moving as he does from place to place, and even when he sits down, as restless as the stick which a traveler saw out West that was so crooked it would not lie still!

There is a sympathy running through the American

mind of such intensity and excitement in relation to our physical growth and political prominence, that our manners, movements, and mind must become intensified. Why, an American can not repose unless he does it with might and main. He must take an extravagant position. It expresses an imperturbable confidence in the destiny of his native country, and the wonderful flexibility in the human skeleton. Foreigners laugh at him for it. A foreign tourist says it is utterly impossible to mistake an American for any one else *en route.* He either has his feet upon the car-seat in front, the back of which he turns over for that purpose, or, if it be occupied, he sits with his knees let into the back of it, keeps up a continual spitting, invariably reads a newspaper, and chews his *quid* as he rides. It should have been for an American tobacconist that Curran proposed a motto for the panels of the coach: *Quid rides!* The wondrous exaggerations of Jules Verne, in his "Around the World in Eighty Days," are placed to the account of an American. Even the leaping of streams by the momentum of the locomotive and train is located upon our territory. When at home, the American soon tires of sitting still, and paces the floor with restless nervousness.

Now, the highest enjoyment of a Frenchman is to hear the last cantatrice in a fashionable opera. The Spaniard's transport reaches its climax when in the arena the matador with skillful thrust stretches his antagonist in the dust. The Neapolitan finds his paradise in the lengthening lusciousness of his macaroni. The German rises to his heaven on the cloud of his dreamful pipe and misty metaphysics. The Englishman grows comfortably ecstatic over his roast beef and naval glory. The Turk ascends to his seventh heaven among the houris while he

smokes his nargileh and sips his Mocha. The African, with his banjo on his knee, is off for the other side of Jordan. The Irishman's chief joy is to take off his frieze at a fair, and, with shillalah whirling, invite any "jintleman to stand before him, or, for the love of God, just to step on the tip end of his coat-tail, and be smashed into smithereens." But the American

> "Finds not in the wide world a pleasure so sweet
> As to sit near the window and tilt up his feet,
> Puff away at the Cuba, whose flavor just suits,
> And gaze at the world 'twixt the toes of his boots."

Let the American be in motion, there is the same extravagance. It is said, "Wherever you see him, he is going over the ground as fast as he can. In Europe he is a pale and breathless sight-seer, always in rapid transition, as if a ghost were pursuing him; insatiably accumulating stages, as if his life depended on the sum total at the end of the week. He carries the fever of business into the tour; and, reckoning up grand sights per score in his mental ledger, he becomes a capitalist in arches, waterfalls, glaciers, old columns, Roman relics, lakes, passes, galleries, statues, and hôtels de ville. In his own country he thinks nothing of packing up all his goods, wife, and children, and setting off to-morrow morning for some swamp two thousand miles off, on the Missouri or Mississippi, where every thing whatever, even the rising of the sun, you would think, from the looks of the scene, has to take place for the first time. He stays until he has converted the swamp or forest into a fruitful field, and then sets off with his wagon-load again to some place as distant from his last home as from his preceding, to renew his battle with nature, to cut down and build, and create a fresh world for culture."

We are not satisfied with perceiving the lines of empire in the infant face of our cradled Hercules, but we must be always dandling the plump young one on our knee, and churning him until the world observes his prematurity of size and vociferousness of lungs! Our vanity is not easily exhausted. We do not like people, however smart, who belittle us. We are great in the past, greater in the present, and greatest in the future. We never tire of hearing our own praises. Alexander the Great at last checked the praise of his courtiers, saying, "What need of such flattery? Are not the exploits of Alexander sufficient to speak his glory?" We have no such sensitive Alexanders in our midst.

With all our vanity, energy, and unrest, we are not a dull, cheerless people. Sour-faced fellows, yellow and dyspeptic, are to be met with in our cars and streets; but they are not the type of the American, for he is as ready for a laugh as for a speculation, as fond of a joke as of an office. Wherever the American goes in his tireless round of observation and traffic—whether he breaks the seal which for ages had closed Japan to the world, or wanders through Africa after Livingstone, or roams for gold at the head-waters of the Amazon, or among the Black Hills reservations, or at the Cape in Africa, or for diamonds, salted or unsalted, in Arizona, or stands with Kane and Hall on the shores of some newly found sea of the poles, or whether more nearly at home—he leaves his trail on every mountain-pass, his axe-stroke in every forest; whether

> "He's whistling round St. Mary's Falls
> Upon his loaded train,
> Or leaving on the pictured rocks
> His fresh tobacco stain,"

he is leaving the rudiments of an empire, the muscle and mind, and the invincible good nature and sense of the humorous, by which he is enabled to mingle with all, and to rule as he mingles.

Wherever he goes he exaggerates his country, his position, his ability; and his humor takes the same size. If he does not enjoy the fun made at his own dilation, he is the cause of its enjoyment by others. What with the great sea-serpents, moon hoaxes, spirit-rappings, Shakerism, Barnum's shows, women's rights, free love, cannon concerts, big organs, much-married Mormonism, and other quackeries and extravagances, if we are not ourselves amused, we export amusement in large quantities. An English reviewer says, "America is determined to keep us amused; we are never left long without a startling novelty from the almighty republic."

Washington Irving, in his quiet way, alluded to the national peculiarity, which he epitomized and incarnated in a man of superior pomposity, as a "great man, and, in his own estimation, a man of great weight—so great, that, when he goes west, he thinks the east tips up!"

III.

AMERICAN HUMOR—ITS EXAGGERATIONS, ETC.

"In all thy humors, whether grave or mellow,
Thou'rt such a touchy, testy, pleasant fellow;
Hast so much wit and mirth and spleen about thee,
There is no living with thee, nor without thee."

Spectator, *No.* 68.

In the previous article on this theme, I considered our humor in its general phases, and especially in its exaggerations.

I now come to consider the distinctive and peculiar qualities of our humor.

We have not a little humor, especially among the more cultivated portion of our people, common to all men—a translatable humor, quite as enjoyable in French as in English. But we have veins of our own as rich and varied as our mines. I propose to prospect for a few of these veins. In all of them the salient quality—exaggeration—appears.

But, *first*, there is a little silvery vein which runs through our newspapers, and which Prentice, of Louisville, first worked successfully. It consists in adroitly garbling a brief extract from an opponent's article, and diverting the meaning into a dash at some frailty of the opponent. The manner in which this is done is humorous, though the matter generally has the pungency of sarcasm and wit. Near akin to this species of humor is that which has recently become a part of our newspaper paragraphs.

In fact, there is a humor peculiar to the American press. Capital and skill are required to keep the funny-paragraph man. His unique distortion of phraseology, his conceited fancy of thought, and his pyrotechnic skill, have become indispensable to the newspaper. He furnishes the foamy crest which tops the heavy columns of tumultuous editorial. Mortimer Thompson (Doesticks), Charles F. Browne (A. Ward), Robert H. Newall (Orpheus C. Kerr), Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain), Mr. Shaw (Josh Billings), not to speak of Max Adeler, M. Quad, and John Oakum, furnish the galaxy for this curious hole in the editorial and social sky. They shine, and differ as they shine. From Brooklyn to Detroit, from Danbury to Vicksburg, from San Francisco to New York, these asteroids of the daily press flicker away for our amusement. They pass and cut and come again; now in blaze, and now in gloom. There is nothing these odd writers will not essay. There is nothing so dark that they will not try to "rive with private ray." The great American poem which, before Walt Whitman yawped about it so barbarically, Mr. Emerson foresaw in clear dream and solemn vision, dazzling the imagination and only waiting for metres, these *genii* are preparing. "Our log-rolling, our negroes, our Indians, our boats, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and pusillanimity of honest men, the Western clearing, Oregon and Texas," are not new elements, but they are yet unsung. Yet they are as full of humorous suggestiveness to these paragraphists as Troy was full of heroism to Homer's eye—if he had one. There is nothing, from the transit of Venus to the Baghvaat Gheeta, which they do not endeavor to deform or adorn.

They have done much by their meteoric style, in squib

and tale, in paragraph and extravaganza, to make up the volume of American humor, which is so hard to be caught, and, when caught, much of it so hard to hold and halter; and, even when fully caparisoned, so apparently useless, till broken in, for the grave utilities of dray or carriage, plow or car.

It is impossible to arrange this branch of our humor upon any methodical plan. The most amusing part of it consists in making a statement, a blank, and an inference! It consists in giving a comic account of a catastrophe, and then, by a sudden and serious turn, leaving a suggestive hiatus, making a conclusion which connects the premises. A woman undertakes to foment a fire by taking observations with a kerosene-lamp near it. The comment is: "Wet day, or there would have been a larger funeral."

Mr. Jones was observed by his wife through the window to kiss the cook in the kitchen. Comment: "Mr. Jones did not go out of the house for several days, and yet there was no snow-storm."

A young man in Pennsylvania attempted to stir up several rabbits out of a hole with the butt-end of his gun the other day. Twenty-three shots have been picked out of his shoulder, and the doctor is still probing. The young man thinks the rabbits must have escaped.

A woman put her tongue to a flat-iron to see if it was hot. That household has been remarkably quiet since.

A dear good fellow at the South telegraphs to his affianced in Maine, "Your life is a rich bouquet of happiness, yourself the sweetest flower. If Northern winds whisper Southern wishes, how happy you must be! Good-night. Happy dreams, sweet love. Frank." Four doctors are in attendance upon the telegraph-operator.

A good man read that the Chinese tell the time of day by examining the pupil of a cat's eye. He carried a cat around in his overcoat. He now invests in arnica plaster, and carries a watch.

"If George had not blowed into the muzzle of his gun," sighed a widow at the funeral of her husband, "he might have got plenty of squirrels, it was such a good day for them."

"He handled his gun carelessly, and put on his angel plumage," is a late obituary notice.

A youth showed his father's pistol to little Dicky. "Eight years of age," was the inscription they put on his little casket.

A good little boy tried to lift himself up by a mule's tail. The doctor thinks the scar on his forehead is permanent.

A man in Memphis undertook to get a mule off the steamboat by twisting his tail. The man landed. Another mistook the head-lights of an engine for a fire-bug. He subsequently joined the temperance society.

A young man fixed himself up for hunting; he would call on a young lady, and let her see how nicely he looked; he stood near the fire, with a pound of powder in his coat-pocket. He was seen going through the roof, with a pensive smile.

A young man in Louisville thought a circular buzz-saw was standing still; he felt it. Several fingers are preserved in the best of spirits.

A young lady, aged only seventeen, raised a large family. She used a keg of powder in the cellar.

A well-dressed person saw a beautiful damsel at a window in New York City. It was New-year's, and he rang the bell. He may thank the beautiful snow at the foot of the steps that only his hat was mashed!

An anvil was dropped upon a colored clergyman from a third-story window. He complained of an injury to his —hat.

He was manipulating the windlass of a well. The handle slipped when the bucket was nearly up. "Might anode—better—hic—than to go foolin' round so much water."

It is not certain that this kind of humor is original with America. In the olden time priests were the only doctors. This was the case among the Jews. The Levites, of course, were enraged when the M. D.'s began, under the kings, to steal away their patients. The Levites, also, were the only historians of those days. To this fact is due a witty slap at the medical tribe, which shows that the inferential humor referred to is old, and of Hebraic origin. In 2 Chronicles, chap. xvi., ver. 12, 13, is the following: "And Asa, in the thirty-and-ninth year of his reign, was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers!"

Sometimes these examples are diffusive in style, and too elaborate in narrative. A case of confusion worse confounded comes to us from California. But the style is really a part of the business. Here it is: "An industrious citizen, who lives not over a thousand miles from town, arose a few mornings ago, while the festive lark was still snoring, and, with a tin bucket under his arm, went to the barn to milk the family cow. It was dark and rainy, and in fumbling about for old Brindle he got into the wrong pew with the off-mule of his wagon team. He can't remember now which side of the roof he went out at, but his recollection of alighting on the picket

fence is very vivid. He expects the bucket down in a few days."

If one of these paragraphists should say that "a man ate ten dozen of eggs on a wager last week," he at once gratifies us by further suggesting, by an acrobatic leap, that the "money he won has been paid to his widow, or that the funeral was a mile long." A man in Kansas said he could drink a quart of Cincinnati whisky, and he did it; and the comment is that the "silver mounting on his coffin cost thirteen dollars and seventy-five cents."

Is it mentioned casually that a boy sat on a keg of powder, and smoked a cigar for fun? Then it follows, through great voids of suggestion, that the fun did not begin till the powder exploded! Is it intimated that a man, on a moonlit night, was trying to convince his shadow not to follow him, but to "go home?" Then the sequitur comes along that he is an object of a "praying crusade."

ARTEMUS WARD AND HIS CLASS.

There is another kind of humor, which Artemus Ward, the showman, originated. His visit to the President elect was an overdrawn picture of the gang of ravenous office-seekers pressing on the "honest old dispenser." He, like Nasby, Billings, and company, hid under bad orthography and worse grammar the neatest nonsense and the broadest satire. While he had not so keen and critical a sense of the dialect or patois as Russell Lowell shows in the character of Hosea Bigelow; while he had not the pointed wit of Holmes or Saxe, whose verses are a fit frame for their exquisite artistic humor, yet Artemus, next to Mark Twain and Bret Harte, hit the very midriff of American humor. Illustrations occur to all. His interview with the Prince of Wales in Canada, his

amusing attempt to buy the Tower of London, which so shocked the pompous old warder, are samples. How the world was startled to know that it continued to "revolve around on her axle-tree onst in twenty-four hours, subjeck to the Constitution of the United States!" "If you ask me," said he, "how pious the muchly married Brigham Young is, I treat it as a conundrum, and give it up." But who can forget how he won his Betsy Jane? The situation of the lovers was embarrassing, to say the least. "We sot thar on the fence, a-swingin our feet two and fro, blushin as red as the Baldinsville skool-house when it was fust painted, and lookin very simple, I make no doubt. My left arm was ockepied in ballunsin myself on the fense, while my rite was woundid lovinly round her waste."

The reasons why the two sympathized are amusingly simple: "Thare was many affectin ties which made me hanker arter Betsy Jane. Her father's farm jined our'n; their cows and our'n squencht their thurst at the same spring; our old mares both had stars in their forrerds; the measles broke out in both famerlies at nearly the same period; our parients (Betsy's and mine) slept reglarly every Sunday in the same meetin-house; and the nabers used to obsarve, 'How thick the Wards and Peasleys air!' It was a surblime site, in the spring of the year, to see our sevral mothers (Betsy's and mine) with their gowns pin'd up so thay couldn't sile 'em, affecshunitly Biling sope together & aboozin the nabers."

A portion of this humor seems to emanate from a pure love of the superlatively grotesque. We hardly know how to analyze such ultimately funny nonsense as that, for instance, of the "Fat Contributor's" account of the "one twin"—a human parenthesis with one bracket gone

—always pawing round, even in sleep, for his missing brother.

What a quaint conceit was that which so puzzled Mark Twain as to what is going to be done with the dead who are petrified, at the Resurrection! He concludes that they are to be *polished!* However, he thought his judgment might be erroneous, as he had had no experience yet in resurrections!

His best humor is in a graver mood. I refer to the elegance and drollery of his "Innocents Abroad." Never has there been a more tear-compelling, juicier piece of serio-comic weeping and wailing than Twain's mourning over the supposed grave of his ancestor Adam. I omit his story of the Seven Sleepers, his naïve remarks as to the *sign manual* and handwriting of Christopher Columbus, his discussion of the oyster's love of enterprise and of the beautiful, whose shells he found on the heights above Smyrna. In a volume like this, intended not to make a laugh, but only to show why we laugh, it is out of place to quote redundantly. But I may be allowed to refer to his recent speech before the Accident Insurance Company, in which he expressed his satisfaction at observing cripples—they advertised the company—and then the further satisfaction which injured humanity, after insurance, took in the loss of legs and arms! But I can not refrain from one familiar quotation. I refer to his lament in memory of his blood-relation: "The tomb of Adam! how touching it was, here in a land of strangers, far away from home and friends! True, he was a blood-relation; though a distant one, still a relation! The unerring instinct of nature thrilled its recognition. The fountain of my filial affection was stirred to its profoundest depths, and I gave way to tumultuous emotion. I

leaned upon a pillar and burst into tears. I deem it no shame to have wept over the grave of my poor dead relative. Let him who would sneer at my emotion close this volume. Noble old man—he did not live to see his child; and I—I—I, alas! did not live to see him. Weighed down by sorrow and disappointment, he died before I was born — six thousand brief summers before I was born. But let us try to bear it with fortitude. Let us trust he is better off where he is. Let us take comfort in the thought that his loss is our eternal gain." This is the humorous sublime! It is lachrymosely and comically magnificent!

This is only equaled by the "Heathen Chinee" of Bret Harte. This poet-humorist of the Sierras, producing the patois of the miner and the hunter of the Pacific slope, and drawing an economical lesson out of the game of euchre by the aid of Ah Sin, the pensive and child-like Celestial, has in him all the facetiousness of Dickens and of his Sairy Gamp concentrated in Truthful James, all the mischievous deviltry which Bill Nye could furnish, and all the roistering rowdyism of a scene in "Harry Lorrequer." Besides, there is a moral which an Oriental story-teller would envy. It brings together the Orient and Occident of cunning fun. Withal, there is the element of exaggeration, without which no American humor seems to be possible.

For another source of our daily fun we are indebted to Shillaber. His Mrs. Partington, however, is but an American edition of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop. We love the old lady the more when we hear her say, like a good housewife, that she gets up every morning at the shrill carrion of the chandelier! But her mischievous nephew, Ike, is purely indigenous. His mischief is the

very essence of Young America, without its father. Ike is yet to grow into the full stature. He stands as the juvenile embodiment of a peculiar vein known among us as practical jokes—what the boys term "sells," and from which springs their expression, "Well, he's sold." This is almost a monomania with some. Even such players as Sothern have not disdained to practice its pranks. It is the result of that proverbial shrewdness which seeks to slyly lead a green one on, in the most natural way in the world, until the catastrophe is ready, when the pitfall is opened, and the victim drops or rushes in with a curiosity only equaled by the surplus fund of experience which he receives. Barnum's book has many examples of these "sells." Yankee tricks, which in the eye of ethics are but another term for swindling, are illustrations. The raciness of the joke hides the rascality of the job; and we applaud the successful humorist, first, because we can not but admire his shrewd calculations on the simplicity of human nature, and, next, because we are glad to see our fellows learning the ways of the world in such an amusing way. In trading, this Yankee is the very incarnation of the keenest shrewdness. He will be sure to do business under the most adverse circumstances, and secure a profit also. This propensity is portrayed in the story of Sam Jones. That worthy, we are told, called at the store of a Mr. Brown, with an egg in his hand, and wanted to "dicker" it for a darning-needle. This done, he asks Mr. Brown if he "isn't going to treat." "What, on that trade?" "Certainly; a trade is a trade, big or little." "Well, what will you have?" "A glass of wine," said Jones. The wine was poured out, and Jones remarked that he preferred his wine with an egg in it. The store-keeper handed to him the identical egg which

he had just changed for the darning-needle. On breaking it, Jones discovered that the egg had *two* yolks. Says he, "Look here; you must give me another darning-needle!"

The Dutchman was a victim to a practical joke who lost five dollars to the Yankee on a bet that the Yankee could eat the Dutchman. Jonathan began the work of mastication at the extremities, and was soon saluted by the roar and kick of the Dutchman. "Oh, mein Gott! Dunder und Blitzen! stop dat bitin'! Take your five dollar. It hurts!"

Sometimes these jokes pay, sometimes not. The Yankee skipper whose vessel was mistaken by an Englishman for a Russian, and who did not run up his bunting until the Englishman was about to broadside him, and who gave as a reason "that he wanted to see how spry Bull would clear for action," came near paying dearly for his joke.

The best humor is always more or less exaggerative. Falstaff's monstering of his courage, and Captain Bobadil's plan, with nineteen men besides himself, of annihilating an army of forty thousand, are illustrations of English exaggeration.

It was both a humorous, useful, and a witty exaggeration, that of the English comedian, Mathews, who recently presented his compliments to the human race, begging leave to state that, as much as he loved them, he found it impossible to provide for the necessities of London alone. No better answer could be returned to the indiscriminate begging in big cities.

IV.

AMERICAN HUMOR—ITS EXTRAVAGANCE IN OPINION AND EXPRESSION.

"We are ready to split our sides with laughing at an extravagance that sets all common sense and serious concern at defiance."—HAZLITT, *On Wit and Humor.*

BUT if there be one quality of American humor by which more than another it can be characterized, it is the universal tendency to exaggeration. Why there should be fun in such efforts is not the inquiry. Whether it be owing to the doctrine of natural depravity, which likes a lie, or whether to vanity, which would blow the bellows for its own dilation, or to an honest intention to amuse without the intention to deceive, I care not to discuss. This tendency to spread one's self to intensity is an American trait, and the great source of our fun. We go our whole length on every occasion, and as much more as we can stretch. Our language is never meek; it is superlative. Our ideas are on their utmost tension; our conduct is regulated on the fast principle. It's "go your death on it;" "pile up the agony;" "make it strong;" "let her went." Grammar and spelling are not regarded. The idea of repression is alien to our sovereigns. We never stay our strength in mid volley, but pour in all the powder, and make the biggest boom of which our calibre is capable. America's motto is, "Go it." We do not know where we shall light, but "Go it." It does not matter how serious the occasion, the prevailing rush must not

be interfered with. The irreverent American translates the phrase, "Rise up and walk," into "Get up and git."

"Talk about your Vesuve!" said an American to a Neapolitan. "Niag 'll put her out in three minutes."

Sometimes such exaggerations are a little nebulous; but the climax always points to unveracious tumidity. A North Carolina corn-sheller makes a wager with a patent-peddler. Dressed in blue jeans, and with a cob-pipe, the sheller selects a red ear of corn, and the fight begins. Of course, the machine gets the worst of it. It is too dilatory. "I ain't got no time to shell agin that thing. It would make me slow-motioned for life!"

A Tennessee editor, rather than do such a thing, would see every thing sunk as far into perdition as a trip-hammer would fall in a thousand years. He would rather see his home wasted and his children starve to death, and then seat himself on their coffins, with a Southern gentleman, and play pushpin for the whisky! This was Parson Brownlow.

"Yes, sir, I've been to Sodom and Gomorry, and seen the pillar of salt Lot's wife was turned into." "Good salt—genewine?" asked a Hoosier of the traveled gospeler. "Yes, sir, a pillar of salt!" "In the open air?" "Yes, sir, in an open field, where she fell." "Well, all I've got to say is, if she'd dropped in Indiana, and in our parts, the cattle would have licked her up before sundown!"

Our ideas have time as the essence, and the least time possible is most essential. La Bruyère said that Wit was the God of Moments, as Genius was the God of Ages. But why should Wit be dissociated from Genius? The quicker the flash, the more potential the controller of the lightning.

When the cholera was devastating New Orleans daily, ay, hourly, a waiter ran into the bar-room of the St. Charles Hotel, and gave this order in the rapid style of such characters: "Two brandy cocktails for No. 24, a gin flip for No. 26, and a coffin for No. 29. Two first in a hurry; t'other can wait."

In one of the railroad disasters on the Baltimore road, a survivor, in answering the query as to what was passing in his mind as the car was rolling over, gave a characteristic answer when he replied, "Oh, y-y-es, I perfectly remember saying, 'Lord, have mercy on us; and don't be too long about it, for there's not a minute to spare!'" In the very article of death the ruling passion of "Put it through, on the fast line," but echoes the enterprise of our people. Scott and Vanderbilt must ride more than a mile a minute, or there is something wrong. Yes, and they ride themselves, to show that it can be done safely. It would seem as if all veneration for the solemnities of life had departed from us. We act as if there were no future world—we certainly act as if we believed there were no Satan and no retribution. Our little boys, behind their cigars, and down on the "old man," the "venerable author of their being," as he is sometimes called, for some parental injunction; the proprietor of the newly organized city of Pumpkinville—away out West—dilating on the unrivaled advantages by water, by rail, and by plank-road of his magnificent site; the Fourth-of-July or Centennial orator telling the masses of Blatherville about the voice of one freeman being equal to a thousand Austrian bayonets, and sweeping the periphery of creation to gather immense symbols of our everlasting glory; the poet just fledged, and trying his feeble pinions on the thunderous symphonies of that almighty heft of water at Ni-

agara; the young attorney addressing his first jury, and never in the course of his extensive practice having met such outrageous injustice as that attempted on his client; or our biggest statesmen behind their senatorial desks, and down on all mankind for their outrage on and presumption toward this great nation—all find expression in the sacrilegious and reckless verse sung by our boys:

"If you want to live well,
Go to a crack hotel,
And call for de best accordin'.
When de bill begins to swell,
Tell 'em all to go to— Well,
We leave for de oder side o' Jordin."

Hear one of our urchins sing that in *fortissimo* style, with a *crescendo*, and you will understand the rollicking independency which obtains among us. The utter disregard of sacred things is not common alone to our boys. In the Reign of Terror in France, while the men were cutting off human heads and carrying them around Paris on pikes, the boys were imitating them by guillotining cats and carrying around their heads on sticks.

IRREVERENCE AND HUMOR.

Our youths outdo the children of all other nations in their lack of reverence for the aged and for their parents. Is it not a true story, that of a particularly smart child who left home at the age of fifteen months because he heard that his parents intended to call him Obadiah? This irreverence enters into our recent poetry. Colonel John Hay understands it. He shows it in the story of the *Prairie Belle* and her heroic engineer. I do not refer to the dialect of the Western boatman, nor to the grotesque picture of the steamer—

"The oldest craft of the line,
With a nigger squat on the safety-valve,
And her furnace crammed, rosin and pine"—

nor to Jim Bludsoe's exclamation above the roar of the flames,

"I'll hold her nozzle agin the bank
Till the last galoot's ashore,"

but to the audacity, suitable to the time and country, with which he ushered his hero into heaven, with all the "cussedness" which made him stick to his post until his ghost went up in the smoke of the burning boat. This audacity is specially noticeable in the pretty and touching story which Colonel Hay has versified in his "Little Breeches." The father finds his little son, after long searching in the prairie snows, sitting upright in the sheep-fold, chewing tobacco.

"How did he git thar? Angels."

And then he breaks out into the exclamation:

"I think that saving a little child,
And bringing him to his own,
Is a derned sight better business
Than loafing around the throne!"

This fills the American idea of unrest. It means business. Such ideas attract not merely because they are expressed humorously and dialectically, not because they glorify the paternal instinct, but because of their utter irreverence. Yet this is not more irreverent than Lowell's verse about an unholy Democrat and the Mexican war:

"You hev to get up airly
Ef you want to take in God."

Its counterpart is seen in the juvenile performance of a

lad who, kneeling by his pious mother, repeated the well-known child's prayer:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake—
Pop goes the weasel!"

For sacrilegious audacity we give the following: An American company in the Mexican war was drawn up in line in one of the churches of the city of Mexico. Suddenly the cry of "Temblor! temblor!" was heard, and while the Mexicans were rushing wildly out of their houses, and in greatest consternation dropping on their knees, beseeching the protection of the Holy Virgin, this American company at every horizontal quake would be dashed against the church-walls. What are they thinking of? With ready exaggeration they liken their situation to one of the surf-boats which they had used at Vera Cruz. At every surge the cry goes round, "Shove her off, boys!" "Steady, men; keep your places." "Now she rises!" "Shove her off!"

Again does our assertion hold good in the case of the youth who was told the story of the two-and-forty children who were torn by the bears for mocking the prophet. Instead of heeding the moral, he went right out and saluted the first baldheaded individual with, "Go up, baldhead! Now bring on your bears!" The Germans have a word, *heilig*. It means healthy and holy. We could well spare some of our pet words for so sound and sacred an adjective.

In Cincinnati, when the Prince of Wales went to the Opera-house, a boy put his head into the carriage-window, and astonished his hearers by singing out, "How are you, Wales? How's your ma?"

Not long since a good man addressed one of our Western Sabbath-schools. He told them of the better world in tones so pathetic, and with tears so sincere, that he seemed to touch chords of finest feeling in their gentle young bosoms. He concluded his discourse by requesting them to sing "Jordan." Instead of "Jordan's stormy banks," he was astounded to hear, in one unbroken chorus, that

"Jordan am a hard road to trabel."

The comic wonder elicited by this irreverent boldness has not yet subsided in the vicinity where it occurred.

One would suppose that, in a Christian country, that stream, consecrated by such holy memories, would not be polluted by the ribaldry of our youth. Jordan! whose banks are hallowed by the foot-print of prophet and saint; whose waters rose up that Israel might bear over that beauteous type of our covenant with Heaven; whose wave mirrored the clear sky, and the peaceful dove descending upon the baptized form of the Redeemer, emblematic of the Father's pleasure! Jordan! the sanctity of whose name, though the twelve stones erected by grateful Israel have long since moldered, and though the spot where the body of our Lord was laved by its waters has no monument for its identity—though the Bedouin roams in its valley, and its calcined soil no longer smiles with cultivation—Jordan is still dear to the Christian of every clime, as with wistful eye he gazes upon that fair and happy land where his possessions lie, and with the power of grace struggles through its swelling flood to that other bank where the world hath no temptation and the tomb no terror, where immortality with the dear ones who have gone before becomes a presence and

a transport! Jordan! whose flow makes music with the dying song of praise, whose light silvers the darkness of the Valley of the Shadow, and fills the fading vision with the glory of answered prayer, and the soul with the reality of that country beyond, where the Good Shepherd forever infolds his own in the sweet pastures by the still waters. Jordan! ay, and what other consecrated association is not broken up by the plowshare of riant, defiant, independent Young America! Said I not truly that our humor stops at no sacrifice for its fun?

Our religious music in fashionable churches is assuming this fast, not to say sacrilegious, tone. Before we had steam-engines to run our organs, Doesticks goes into a church, where the organist receives a big salary to draw a large house with his music. The organist strikes up "Old Hundred." At first it goes as it ought to; but soon the organist's left hand becomes unruly among the bass notes; then the right cuts up a few monkey shines on the treble; then the *left* threw in a large assortment of quavers; *right* led off with a grand flourish and a few dozen variations; *left* struggled manfully to keep up, but soon gave out, dead beat, and after that went back to first principles, and hammered away religiously at "Old Hundred," in spite of the antics of its fellow; *right* struck up a march, marched into a quickstep, quickened into a galop; *left* still kept at "Old Hundred;" *right* put in all sorts of extras to entice the left from its sense of propriety; *left* still unmoved; *right* put in a few bars of a popular waltz; *left* wavers a little; *right* strikes up a favorite polka; *left* evidently yielding; *right* dances into a jig; *left* now fairly deserts and goes over to the enemy, and both commence an animated hornpipe, leaving poor "Old Hundred" to take care of itself. Then a crash, a

squeak, a rumble, and an expiring groan; and the overture is finished, and service begins.

Is not this the fashionable echo to the boy's song of "Jordan," told humorously by an almost forgotten writer —in fact, the forerunner of the large class who rely on exaggeration's artful aid for their fun? The moral quality of our humor is not here and now discussed. We can only reprehend its lack of veneration.

OVERDRAWN HUMOROUS DESCRIPTIONS.

A few years ago the letters of Doesticks, from which I have quoted, ran through the press, a gross exaggeration. So wild were they that they could not last long, but their ephemeral success shows the keen delight of our people in this limitless humor. His description of the American tragedian's voice ought to be recalled: "Imitating by turns the horn of Gabriel, the shriek of the locomotive, the soft and gentle tones of a forty horse-power steam-saw-mill, the loving accents of the scissors-grinder's wheel, the amorous tones of the charcoal-man, the rumble of the omnibus, the cry of the driver appertaining thereto —rising from the entrancing notes of the infuriated house-dog to the terrific cry of the oyster-vender—causing the supes to tremble in their boots, making the fiddlers look around for some place of safety, and moving the assembled multitude to echo back the infernal roar." This is an etching in broad limning of an exaggeration. It was enjoyed because the subject was commensurate with the description. Shakspeare himself had contemporary players who suited this description. Nor are such characters limited to the stage. They are to be found in the pulpit, and even in so sedate a body as Congress.

Our habits and fashions as well as our talk are all

on the extensive scale. A faithful description of them would provoke laughter. But that is not enough. The description must be overdrawn. To illustrate: It is some time since ladies had taken to hoops. They had completely usurped the sidewalks in the cities. A cynical old bachelor meets two fair ones promenading, and thus enters upon his description: "At forty paces distant they seemed like miniature pyramids of silk; at twenty paces we smelled Cologne-water and other essences; at ten paces a little lump like a bonnet was discernible at the top of the skirt pyramid; at three paces distant we heard the imbedded voice of a female in the dress; at two paces we discovered four ringlets of slim appearance, resembling cat-tails dipped in molasses, two eyes of weak and absurd expression, lips like unto thin sandwiches, and cheeks rouged with *mienfun* (Chinese coloring). Positively this was all that could create in us the impression or imagination that the above things (dry-goods, etc.) formed a woman."

Yet who would not rather have a gigantic piece of unveracity, like that story told by the man at the wheel of a Vicksburg steamer? A stranger inquires about the alligators. After giving statistics upon statistics of the number of alligators on the sand-banks, and per mile, and the number destroyed, the truthful narrator reaches the climax. It is in the benevolent captain of the *Nancy*, who once injured so many of the beloved animals on a trip, that he threw liniment overboard to them; and they, in their tender regard for his goodness of heart, always responded as he went up and down. They not only lifted his boat over bars, but, in one of his extremities of delay, towed him up to Vicksburg, fifty miles! These exaggerations, like others of the Doesticks order, have a

cause. Our national success has kindled it. Within the century, what have we not done? Moved the Indians west of the Mississippi, and by treaty, etc., given them missionaries and whisky, money and schools, and our Interior Department is trying to civilize all that the War Department can not murder; we have made our land the principal cotton and the great grain growing country of the world; we have increased our numbers twelvefold, our annual income twentyfold, and our conceit, pride, debt, and humor—manifold!

True, we made no figure at the great World's Exhibition at London, in 1851, nor at Vienna, in 1873, for our greatness was too large for transportation. I remember well the poor display we made in 1851. We had India rubber of every conceivable form, and daguerreotypes without number, the one emblematic of the conscience, and the other of the vanity, of our people. *Punch* laughed at our eagle floating over the vast expanse of nothing; but did it affect our complacency? Our isolation from Europe, our independency, added to our surprising progress, have impressed us with the idea that we are the model people, and this impression will make us so as surely as thought precedes action. This self-esteem is no doubt carried to a laughable length; but ought we to be unduly sensitive when chaffed about it? Without it we should never have declared, or won, or enjoyed our independence.

Before the Declaration of Independence we went our length in begging, as loyal subjects of a beloved crown, for our English rights. History says that our humble petitions were presented on knees to the royal head, who scorned us. But we were no sooner scorned than we "went our length" the other way. The Declaration

of Independence is a splendid exaggeration in itself. "When in the course of human events," it begins. It could not say "American" events. "The laws of nature and of nature's God" is its transcendent invocation. "All men are created equal," though a million of ebony evidences were then existing to the contrary. "All government derives its powers from the consent of the governed," when, as Garrison used to demonstrate, if that were true, no government could exist for a moment.

With such a chart, and with such a grand initial momentum, need we wonder at the magnitude of our ideas, the magniloquence of our orators, and the exaggerations of our humor? Our large lakes, our long rivers, our mountain ranges, our mammoth conifera, our vast mineral treasures, our wide prairies, our great crops, our growing cities, our enlarging territory, our unrivaled telegraphs, our extensive railroads and their equally extensive disasters, our mechanical skill and its infinite production, our unexampled civil unpleasantness and its results, would seem to call for an aggrandized view of our political and social position, and, as a consequence, for a broad, big, Brobdingnagian humor.

Think of what we have had these past years — the horse distemper, the Boston and Chicago fires, and two "tidal-wave" elections — all dispensations of what Mrs. Malaprop would call an unscrupulous Providence!

There is such a unity in the human mind that it can not be high-strung on one subject without being similarly keyed up on another. There is a sympathy running through the American mind of such intensity and excitement in relation to our physical growth and political prominence that our humor must become intensified. Our rivers in their spring floods typify our humor with

their rush, their whirl, and their overflow of all bounds. Future chapters on legislative and oratorical humors abundantly demonstrate this position.

A half century ago the *Edinburgh Review* examined our census, and found enough of honest triumph for America in her actual position. It hoped that we might spare that dazzling galaxy of epithets by which we undertook to persuade ourselves that we were the greatest, most refined, most moral, and most enlightened people on the earth. It hoped we would cease sending our statesmen up every morning to Pisgah's heights to enjoy a prospective subjugation of the whole globe. We were even then advised to drop our superlatives. As well advise an American to refuse his photograph to be hung at a county fair! We are great, but intensely conscious of it. No wonder that Dickens returned home to laugh at the infinitude of "remarkable men" everywhere introduced to him. At every village he was pointed out General A, or Colonel B, or Esquire C, as such.

OUR HUMOROUS WORDS AND DIALECT.

If, as some one says, posture is indicative of character; if, as a poet sings, there is a happiest, gayest attitude of things, the American posture is unexampled in our kind. But what shall we say of that similar extravagance which pervades our dialect and our opinions? Our dialect has not only swollen to a laughable bulk, but the wildest perversions of good words have resulted from it. We are slaves to the tyranny of verbal affluence. One of our scholars published in 1848 a dictionary of Americanisms; it contains over four hundred pages. We naturalize outlandish words with more speed than we naturalize aliens. What with the Dutch of New York, the Scandinavians

of the North-west, the Welsh of New York and Ohio, the French of Louisiana, the Germans of Pennsylvania, the Minorcans of Florida, the Spanish of the Mexican war, the Mennonites of Russian proscription, the Indian terms ingrafted on our stock, the provincialisms of New England and of the West, and the broad-voweled Africanese of the South, not to speak of the Chinese pigeon English, we present not a few heterogeneous elements to begin with, which our writers and speakers are not loath to aggrandize. An American returns after a journey to Vicksburg. His salutation to the first man he meets illustrates his polyglottous propensity: "Moind your eye, surr! Ach! I was glad to know you. I taught I know efery body here. Wasse Melican mannee? Parlez-vous Français? Nixy? Oh! dat vas morch better. You was Yarman—don't it? Not by a dog gone sight." And so, in the end, the American patois predominates. No sooner is the horse distemper prevalent than it is named "epizootic," and then reduced to and employed as a verb by the negro minstrelsy of our cities. It was only the other day, after the election, that a New York editor saluted the writer as a "Tidal Waver!" Our war gave us at least three words which are thoroughly at home in our midst, "skedaddle," "gobble," and "bummer."

What a bevy and sudden cast of beautiful thoughts are suggested by these: "Give him Jesse;" "See the elephant;" "mizzle;" "cavortin';" "absquatulate;" "vamos;" "beat all hollow;" "blazes;" "bobbery;" "to make no bones of;" "cawtawampously chawed up;" "chicken fixins;" "cut a swathe;" "flat-footed;" "flummux right out;" "full chisel;" "let her drive;" "rip—siz—went;" "rope in;" "scalawag;" "shell out;" "yank her out;" "feel streaky;" "up to the hub;" "wamble-

cropped," and "sockdolager!" Our political nomenclature, even, would make a chapter. What with "Doughface," "Buncombe," "Barn-burner," "Hunker," "Short Hairs," "Swallow-tails," and the various kinds of "shells," none but the professed politician can keep up with the political slang factory.

The metaphorical and other odd expressions belonging to the West and South—a list of which Mr. Benjamin gives in his lecture on Americanisms, and which Mr. Bartlett has collected in his dictionary—originate in some funny anecdote, which makes its way up through many mouths until it obtains the imprimatur and stress of the *Congressional Globe* and the currency and accent of the metropolitan press. If the history of our lexicography were written, it would be a comic one; for where no anecdote could be found as the root of our new and odd phrases, their origin would be traced to the necessities of uneducated but original geniuses, who make words for their ideas precisely as they make a new ox-yoke or a threshing-machine. Their origin is as natural and spontaneous, though not so beautiful, as the figure of Apollo and the Muses, in the stone of the ring of Pyrrhus. These words soon become popular from the oddity of the thing, and in time find places beside the dignified Latin and homely Saxon of our tongue.

John Bull growls at what he calls new-fangled terms from America; and he calls on his children to tolerate no longer that which, commencing in humorous aberration, has continued till it has become a nuisance. In the United States, he says, if a half-dozen newspaper editors, postmasters, and dissenting ministers, two or three revolvers, a bowie-knife, a tooth-pick, and a plug of tobacco, get together, the meeting is called a monster mass-

meeting. If Joel Wainright blows out General Ruffle's brains on the New Orleans levee, it is not a murder, but a "difficulty." Our civil war even is called the "late unpleasantness." If any thing is big, it is forthwith called mammoth; so that one might suppose Anak and all his sons were nephews of Uncle Sam. Some English author waits patiently to hear of our plesiosaurus pumpkins, or ichthyosaurus hedgehogs, leviathan lap-dogs, behemoth butterflies, and great sea-serpent Congressional speeches! He gives seventeen synonyms for the word "money," thirty-two for the word "drunk," and thinks it time to stop this importation of slang. Is this verbose flow of the animal and inventive spirit entirely salutary?

We ought to welcome this genesis of new words, since our exaggeration has emasculated and disrobed so many of our old English words of their meaning. The word *powerful* is powerless to convey any significance; *magnificent* is tawdry; *mighty* is weak. All through the South the expression "mighty nice" or "mighty weak" is as common as that vulgarity in England, "awfully jolly." There is no end to our superlative language. *Desperate*, *all-killing*, *all-fired*, etc., are gentle terms; *first-rate* is generally acknowledged to be fifth-rate; a *roarer* is as gentle as a cooing dove; *tip-top* is from fair to middling; *splendiferous* is only tolerable; *old hoss*, when analyzed, is found to be the tenderest appellation of a biped juvenile without hoofs; and an *institution* is any thing the institutor pleases—an eating-saloon, a free-love club, a shoe-peg factory, a steam fire-engine, a water-cure, a six-barreled pistol, a barber's shop, or a sausage-stuffing machine. Some years ago a New Orleans paper called the negro an institution. A sanguine young father denominates his baby an institution. The generalizing mind of America

sees in the baby the germ of future republics, and he dares express it. Not long since a New York paper offered a reward for a new set of terms to express what used to be expressed by many of these familiar words.

As illustrative not only of this tendency to coin new phrases, but fresh and exaggerated metaphors, we quote from Lowell several of our oddest expressions. The backwoodsman prefers his tea "barfoot," meaning without cream and sugar; a rocky piece of land is heavily mortgaged; hell is a place where they don't cover up their fires o' nights; a hill is so steep that, in the language of the stage-driver, lightning couldn't go down it without being shod; the negro is so black that charcoal would make a white mark on him; the weather was so cold that a fellow who had been taking mercury found his boots full of it.

A lover likens his mistress's ear to the wings of a bat; her neck is like a crooked-neck squash; her hair as straight as a carpenter's line, and like the silk of an ear of green corn; her nose has a crook like a sled-runner; her eyes are like a glass button or a lightning-bug; and her gait is that of a foundered horse in a canter!

A balloonist went up so high that, when he wanted to come down, he had to take good aim to hit the earth, it was so small.

A Colorado man began to tell of a barn on his ranch, 190 × 280 feet, seven stories high, and bay-windows. He was at once overtopped by a bigger one with steam elevators; and, again, that was overtopped by a chicken-coop, 550 × 832 feet, and a cupola on top for the roosters. The roosters died from the high, light atmosphere! The word *roostar*, in fact, is American. He is the *star* that never *sets!*

Our unlettered people have the same strain: "mean enough to steal acorns from a blind hog;" "cold as the north side of a grave-stone in winter;" "quicker than greased lightning;" "handy as a pocket in a shirt;" "he's a whole team and a dog and tar-bucket under the wagon." Sometimes this tendency is subdued in the quaintest way. An American was asked if he had crossed the Alps. He said he guessed he did come over some "risin' greound!" Another advised a man with big feet, who wanted a boot-jack, to go back to the forks in the road and pull his boots off!

Our editors, with their accounts of meetings, their rallies to the indomitable, who are conquered every other year, and with their grandiloquent fustian, paint the people who sit to them for a likeness. The ware is suited to the demand. As is the court, so is the bar; as is the public, so will be their organs. None know better than the editor himself the ridiculousness of his rhetorical gasconade. Your editor, cigar in hand, cool as the arctics, sits down in his sanctum and writes a rally for the election. He calls on his political friends: "Once more to the breach!" He hears "the shouts of victory and the lamentations of the vanquished." He puffs his cigar. "Victory must perch on our banners. Down with corruption! Freemen, keep your council-fires burning brightly!" He takes another puff, italicizes the manuscript, and writes on. "Push on the columns! Rout them! Overwhelm them! Let the welkin ring with the soul-stirring tidings that the country is saved!" He knocks off the ashes, and the "devil" cries for "copy." The breathless patriot besprinkles it with notes of admiration, and placidly smiles as he passes it over.

The American acts upon the principle which physiolo-

gists have remarked, that there is something besides the nutritive quality requisite in food; that a certain degree of distention of the stomach is required to enable it to act with its full powers; and that it is for this reason hay and straw must be given to horses as well as corn and oats, in order to supply the necessary bulk.

THE HOLIDAY SUITS OF OUR LANGUAGE.

The elephantine expansion which our language thus undergoes could not fail to attract the facile pen of Ollapod. He gives the capabilities of our vernacular in these instances:

ORIGINAL. "Go to the devil and shake yourself." IMPROVED. "Proceed to the arch-enemy of mankind and agitate your person."

ORIGINAL. "He looks two ways for Sunday." IMPROVED. "One who, by reason of the adverse disposition of his optics, is forced to scrutinize in duple directions for the Christian Sabbath."

ORIGINAL. "None so deaf as them that won't hear." IMPROVED. "No persons are obtuse in their auricular apprehension equal to those who repudiate vocal by adverse inclinations."

"Root, hog, or die" is rendered, "Queen City quadruped, perforate the Mother Earth with thy proboscis, or forever cease to exist."

"A still sow drinks the most swill" is, "That taciturn female of the porcine genus which imbibes the richest nutriment."

"'Tis a wise child that knows its own father." "That juvenile individual is indeed sage who possesses authentic information with respect to the identity of his parental derivative."

Sam Patch could be of no other nation than that which possesses Niagara; and he is called by one of our writers "the aqueous Empedocles, who dived for sublimity!"

A learned young lady the other day astonished the company by asking for the loan of a diminutive argenteous truncated cone, convex on its summit, and semiperforated with symmetrical indentations. She wanted a thimble.

A student's excuse to his "Alma Mater" for not returning as soon as expected is in point: "The circumambient atmosphere had so far congealed the pellucid stream of the river Potomac that I was constrained to procrastinate my premeditated egress through the 'Palatine Province' of Maryland for the medical, chemical, and clinical co-operation and coadjuvancy of the sensitive sons of Esculapius, whereby the morbosity of my parental relative, in consanguinity, was so far magnified as to present an entire extinguishment of vivification."

Of the same quality is that species of circumlocution, often resorted to, for hiding some unpleasant fact; as when a jockey mitigates the kicking habit of his horse. "Oh, he only has a playful propensity of extending the hinder hoof, under a slight reaction of the muscles."

Instead of saying that a boy was bitten by a mad dog, it is stated that he was attacked by a dog while the animal was laboring under cerebral excitement.

Much of our African humor takes this form, in imitation of wordy and intellectual white folks! But the crowding of this sesquipedalian language into ordinary talk is not confined to the pious African gospeler. Even "Mother Goose" is made, like the same bird in the German fable, to break her neck in trying to elongate and curve it like the beautiful swan. Mary and her little

lamb is rendered, "Mary was the happy possessor and proprietress of a diminutive incipient sheep, whose outer covering was as devoid of color as congealed vapor," etc. Or the old negro melody, "Uncle Ned," the first verse of which runs thus:

"There was an old nigger,
And his name was Uncle Ned,
And he died long ago, long ago."

It is thus paraphrased: "There once existed, in years gone by, an ancient and decrepit colored individual who rejoiced under the cognomen of Uncle Edward. He has, however, long since departed to that bourn from whence no traveler returneth. His cranium was entirely destitute of the frizzly capillary substance like unto that of a sheep, which fact is peculiar from its being well known that the Caput is the particular location thereof of the aforementioned vegetation. Uncle Edward's decimal digits were like unto the spontaneous growth of the cane on the banks of the Lower Mississippi; the sparkling orbs that usually light the countenances of all young and healthy sons of Ham were absent; and his dental protuberances had, from long use, become so thoroughly decayed that Indian pone bread was no longer a temptation to the old gentleman; but, on the contrary, he considered it a delusion and a snare. This article of diet, therefore, was allowed to pass by with perfect impunity."

Not content with making out of "fish," finny denizens of the vasty deep; out of "the foundation of a house," the substratum of the superstructure; and out of a "walk," a promenade; our word-mongers "wollup" the very donkey that "would not go" into an animal averse to speed; and the encouraging cry is, "Go on, Edward!"

The opinions of our people are always aggrandized, not only by intense language, but by superadding to them other ideas, until they tower up beyond all verisimilitude. The sober hue, the faithful outline, the correct perspective and mellow shading which give relief by contrast, are discarded for the glare and distortion which suit our humor. An Englishman expressed excited delight and admiration at the word "big gun," applied to one of our best thinkers.

Pick up a Southern paper. The editor wishes to say that the Mississippi is very low. How does he say it? "The cat-fish are rigging up stern-wheelers!" Another wishes to give an idea of the altitude of his Shanghai: "He is so high that he has to go down on his knees to crow."

A strange genius, describing a lake in Minnesota: "It is so clear that by looking into it you can see them making tea in China."

If any thing is insignificant, it is "the little end of nothing whittled down to a point." If any thing is great, it "beats thunder," or "all creation." Fast? "Lightning ain't a patchin'!" It goes "rippety click, in no time." Our boys bet "their life on it"—nothing less.

An Illinois enthusiast wishes to give you his idea of heaven: "It is an endless prairie of flowers, fenced in with pretty girls."

A Mississippian brags to a Yankee about a big tree he chopped at for ten days, took a walk around it on Sunday, and found a man who had been chopping on the other side for two weeks! This was before the mammoth conifera of the Pacific were discovered. We know now that the only mistake in this description is in the location.

A horse traveled so fast that his rider fancied he was passing through a grave-yard, from the rapid succession of mile-stones.

It is doubtful if any language or country furnishes a sample of such an advertisement of a crack hotel as appeared in a metropolitan paper. It was the "Suitem House," by Strive & Sweet, proprietors:

"This hotel has been built and arranged for the special comfort and convenience of summer boarders. On arrival, each guest will be asked how he likes the situation; and if he says the hotel ought to have been placed upon the knoll, or farther down toward the village, the location of the house will be immediately changed. Corner front rooms, up only one flight, for every guest. Baths, gas, hot and cold water, laundry, telegraph, restaurant, fire-alarm, bar-room, daily paper, coupé, sewing-machine, grand piano, a clergyman, and all other modern conveniences in every room. Meals every minute, if desired, and consequently no second table. English, French, and German dictionaries furnished to every guest to make up such a bill of fare as he may desire, without regard to the bill affair afterward in the office. Waiters of every nationality and color desired. Every waiter furnished with a libretto, button-hole bouquet, full-dress suits, ball tablets, and his hair parted in the middle. Every guest will have the best seat in the dining-hall and the best waiter in the house. Any guest not getting his breakfast red-hot, or experiencing a delay of sixteen seconds after giving his order for dinner, will please mention the fact to the office, and the cook and the waiters will be blown from the mouths of cannon, in front of the hotel, at once. Children will be welcomed with delight, and requested to bring hoop-sticks and

hawkeys to bang the carved rose-wood furniture especially provided for that purpose, and peg-tops to spin on the velvet carpet; and they will be allowed to bang on the piano at all hours, yell in the halls, slide down the banisters, fall down-stairs, carry away dessert enough for a small family in their pockets at dinner, and make themselves as disagreeable as the fondest mother can desire. Washing allowed in rooms, and ladies giving an order to 'put me on a flat-iron,' will be put on one at any hour of the day or night. A discreet waiter, who belongs to the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias, and who was never known even to tell the time of day, has been employed to carry milk punches and hot toddies to ladies' rooms in the evening. Every lady will be considered the belle of the house, and row-boys will answer the bell promptly. Should any row-boy fail to appear at a guest's door with a pitcher of ice-water, more towels, a gin cock-tail, and pen, ink, and paper, before the guest's hand has left the bell-knob, he will be branded 'Front' on the forehead, and imprisoned for life. The office clerk has been carefully selected to please every body, and can lead in prayer; play draw-poker; match worsted at the village store; shake for drinks at any hour, day or night; play billiards; a good waltzer; and can dance the German; make a fourth at euchre; amuse children; repeat the Beecher trial from memory; is a good judge of horses; as a railway and steamboat reference, is far superior to Appleton's or any body else's 'Guide;' will flirt with any young lady, and not mind being cut dead when 'pa comes down;' don't mind being damned any more than a Connecticut river; can room forty people in the best room in the house when the hotel is full; attend to the annunciator; and answer questions in Greek, He-

brew, Choctaw, Irish, or any other polite language, at the same moment without turning a hair."

A Louisianian demonstrates the heat of the weather. His thermometer got so high it exploded, frightening him into old age, killing one pointer dog, and wounding two roosters!

A tender, sensitive young female tells how she felt "when first he kissed her"—"like a big tub of roses swimming in honey, cologne, nutmeg, and blackberries!"

It was an American who first said of a hard old man, "He don't breathe; he ticks." It was an American who scratched around for an hour with his night-key, and exclaimed, "Some one—has stolen—has stolen—the key-hole."

Many years ago I was one of a party in Washington City, when South and North vied with each other in convivial life. Another of the party was General Dawson, member from Western Pennsylvania, whose homestead was Albert Gallatin's old home. He was an admirable story-teller. I recall somewhat sadly, now that he is gone, how well he illustrated the laziness of a class of Virginians. The story was a part of his Congressional canvassing. On one occasion he happened across the Pennsylvania line into a little village of Virginia. He was in the midst of a group around the tavern. While treating and talking, a procession approached, which looked like a funeral. He asked, who was to be buried?

"Job Dowling," said they.

"Poor Job!" sighed the general. (He was a good-natured, good-for-nothing, lazy fellow, living on the few fish he caught and the squirrels he killed, but mostly on the donations of his neighbors.) "So poor Job is dead, is he?"

"No, he ain't dead, zactly," said they.

"Not dead—not d— Yet you are going to bury him?"

"Fact is, general, he has got too infernal all-fired lazy to live. We can't afford him any more. He's got so lazy that the grass began to grow over his shoes—so everlastin' lazy that he put out one of his eyes to save the trouble of winkin' when out a gunnin'."

"But," says the general, "this must not be. It will disgrace my neighborhood. Try him a while longer, can't you?"

"Can't; too late—coffin cost one dollar and a quarter. Must go on now."

About this time the procession came up and halted, when the general proposed, if they would let Job out, he would send over a bag of corn. On this announcement the lids of the coffin opened, and Job languidly sat up: the cents dropped from his eyes as he asked,

"Is the corn shelled, general?"

"No, not shelled."

"Then," said Job, as he lazily lay down, "go on with the funeral!"

Akin to this is the exaggerated story of the miser and the barber. The miser was dying, and knew it. In a voice that was rapidly growing weaker:

"You—charge—ten cents—to—shave—live men?"

"Yes, that is our price," replied the barber.

"What—you charge—to shave—dead men?"

"One dollar," said the barber, wondering what he meant.

"Then—shave me—quick," said the miser, nervously eying the watch which the doctor held in his hand. He was too weak to speak further, but the doctor interpreted aright the question that was in his eyes.

"Fifteen minutes," replied the doctor.

He made a feeble motion, as with a lather-brush, and the barber was at his work in a jiffy. He performed his task with neatness and dispatch; and although the sick man had several sinking spells of an alarming nature, yet he bore up to the end. When the last stroke of the razor was given, the miser whispered, in tones of satisfaction, "That'll do—*ninety—cents saved*," and immediately expired.

MANIFEST DESTINY AND ITS HUMORS.

It matters little what the idea is, only let it be strongly expressed. Give the American his theme, allow him creation for the range of his figures; and, in the language of one of his tribe, he will "stand one foot on the Georgium Sidus—a star which rolls in unfathomable space—and the other upon the terrestrial sphere, and bring down the forked lightnings."

Is it in the objurgatory vein? Hear a patriot's ungrammatical philippic on Benedict Arnold: "He was a traitor, Mr. Speaker, who tried to sell his country. It was the everlastin' ruination of him; and for what he done he will be rewarded with the volcanic eruptions of eternal infamy, and go down to remotest posterity kivered all over with hell's arsenic!"

A country editor describes a rival town in this copiousness of imagery. He said: "It takes several of their pigs to pull a blade of grass, and they are so poor that the foremost seizes the spear in his mouth, the balance having taken each other by the tail, when they give a pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, and if it breaks, the whole tumble to the ground for want of sufficient strength to support themselves. It takes three or four of them to make a shadow."

Need I refer you to the sermon of the Baptist preacher in Mississippi? Is it not in every one's memory? It will not out. Its humor was so contagious that it seemed to sweep over the American heart as if the sainted brother himself stood before us as he "played on a harp of a theousand strings—sperrits of just men made perfect!"

What would not our exaggerated and sacrilegious audacity attack?

When Crashaw writes about the marriage-supper in Cana, that "the conscious water saw its God and blushed," we have all the glory of imagery; but it is too splendid to call it a sparkle, too sacred to be called wit; and yet — yet — how Young America would joke on water, mixing it! How the idea of its blushing would strike his irreverent spirit! How its exaggeration would be aggrandized! I once heard a Congressman, in debate, say that the question now agitating the age is, "Did the prodigal come home before he was hungry, or, being half lean, come home because the old man had a good fat calf?"

I have an extract from a speech delivered by Mr. Guild, of Erin, Tennessee, in August, 1874, which illustrates the point suggested in a wild and wonderful way. The orator is a gentleman of culture and taste. Perhaps his speech is among the last of the kind. He returned to his home in Tennessee, and, surveying the changes of the last quarter of a century, he said: "Our narrow settlements, bordering on the Atlantic, and running north to the lakes, have been in an unexampled manner extended from ocean to ocean, and State upon State has been added to the Union, with their teeming millions. 'Westward the star of empire takes its way,' until our eagle, grown with the dimensions of our country, rests

his talons on the loftiest peaks of the Rocky Mountains, drops one pinion in the Atlantic Ocean, bathes the other in the distant waters of the Pacific, and while he is billing and cooing Cuba to come and unite her destiny with that of the United States, his tail is cooled by resting upon the icebergs of the North." The only defect in this strain is, that the eagle is not allowed to scream!

What but a sense of humor in both speaker and auditors could possibly have carried off such a speech as that alleged to have been made by the great Webster? "Men of Rochester, I am glad to see you, and I am glad to see your noble city. Gentlemen, I saw your falls, which I am told are one hundred and fifty feet high. That is a very interesting fact. Gentlemen, Rome had her Cæsar, her Scipio, her Brutus, but Rome in her proudest days never had a water-fall one hundred and fifty feet high! Gentlemen, Greece had her Pericles, her Demosthenes, and her Socrates, but Greece in her palmiest days never had a water-fall one hundred and fifty feet high! Men of Rochester, go on. No people ever lost their liberties who had a water-fall one hundred and fifty feet high!"

Not to reproduce illustrations all too familiar, there is an extract which sums up the case in the "most unparrelled" style. It was intended as a humorous reply to some gasconade of a rival journal by an imaginative editor: "This is a glorious country! It has longer rivers and more of them, and they are muddier and deeper, and run faster, and rise higher, and make more noise, and fall lower, and do more damage, than the rivers of any other country. It has more lakes, and they are bigger and deeper, and clearer and wetter, than those of any other country. Our rail-cars are bigger, and run faster, and pitch off the track oftener, and kill more peo-

ple, than all other rail-cars in this and every other country. Our steamboats carry bigger loads, are longer and broader, burst their boilers oftener, and send up their passengers higher, and the captains swear harder than steamboat captains in any other country. Our men are bigger and longer and thicker, can fight harder and faster, drink more mean whisky, chew more bad tobacco, and spit more and spit farther, than in any other country. Our ladies are richer, prettier, dress finer, spend more money, break more hearts, wear bigger hoops, shorter dresses, and kick up the devil generally to a greater extent, than all other ladies in all other countries. Our children squall louder, grow faster, get too expansive for their pantaloons, and become twenty years old sooner by some months, than any other children of any other country on the earth."

Dickens found one of our representative men, and named him Pogram. He is not only to be seen at the centennial celebrations, but it is he who welcomes the kings of the earth to our shores. It is he who speaks about our flag that floats on every sea, and our manufactures which embrace every product of industry. "Our fellow-countryman is a model of a man, quite fresh from Natur's mold," said Mr. Pogram. "He is a true-born child of this free hemisphere; verdant as the mountains of our country, bright and flowing as our mineral Licks; unspiled by withering conventionalities as air our broad and boundless Perearers! Rough he may be; so air our Barrs. Wild he may be; so air our Buffalers. But he is a child of Natur and a child of Freedom, and his boastful answer to the despot and the tyrant is that his bright home is in the Settin' Sun!"

He is not a personage of fiction. Although he is not

what he was, yet he lives still. Is there real humor in such extravagance? One reason why such displays are humorous is that the speaker is expressing his feelings far more vehemently than his audience can go along with him; so that, as Cicero says of such rhetorical displays, they seem like one raving among the sane, or intoxicated amidst the sober. The orator is loaded to the muzzle, and the recoil is comical, when he goes off.

Connection between the ideas is not essential, nor the quantity of meaning conveyed. A drop of idea will diffuse itself through a sea of verbosity; and the more cloudy the idea, the greater the intensity. Take that very dim idea of our manifest destiny; in what involutions of verbiage hath it not been lost? With what complacency the American sees the nations march before him, empires tremble, and crowns fall at his invincible feet! In the imagery of Young America, he takes a seat on the topmost ridge of the Alleghanies, one foot on the Nevadas and the other on Chimborazo, smokes a long nine with the man in the moon, hears the Antilles roar responsive to the Rocky Mountains, invokes the spirit of General Jackson, hears the tramp of the coming generations, and doesn't care a Continental—cuss! That was a characteristic exaggeration which a Western drover attempted at the Crystal Palace to a company who were looking at the statue of the infant Ptolemy Lagus, fed and shielded by an eagle: "It's a cussed Yankee lie! Ptolemy Lagus! Don't I know? I tell ye it's the American eagle feeding young Sam with gravel stones to give him grit!"

The days of our spread-eagle oratory are nearly over, at least in our legislative bodies. Before the war we had rhetorical flags and emblematic birds in profusion. The last effort in Congress of this kind was that of a Louisi-

ana member during the first years of the war. He made a pathetic apostrophe to the escutcheon of his State above him, on the painted glass. How touching his appeal to the female pelican and the little pelicans feeding from her breast! It was received with titters, which enlarged into laughs, and the laughs into guffaws. The like has not been attempted since. Congress, at least, is growing fond of facts; and when they are humorously applied, it is not afraid to roar. But the day of Crockett and Mullins has departed. Nothing which I have collated in the chapters on "Legislative Humors" can compare with a recent speech by a member of the Missouri Legislature. It combines this spreading elocution with a unique and grandiose jocoseness. His theme is the 8th of January. Some one objected to posting up a hundred bills announcing that the glorious day had arrived. The objection was on the score of economy. Here is his retort: "The gentleman is suddenly seized with the 'retrenchment gripes,' and squirms around like a long red worm on a pin-hook. Gentlemen keep continually talking about economy. I myself do not believe in tying the public purse with cobweb strings; but when retrenchment comes in contact with patriotism, it assumes the form of 'smallness.' Such economy is like that of Old Skinflint, who had a pair of boots made for his little boy without soles, that they might last the longer. I reverence 'the day we celebrate.' It is fraught with reminiscences the most stirring; it brings to mind one of the grandest events ever recorded in letters of living fire upon the walls of fame by the strong right arm of the god of war! On such occasions we should rise above party lines and political distinctions. I never fought under the banner of Old Hickory, but, 'by the Eternal,' I

wish I had. If the old war-horse was here now, he would not know his own children from the side of Joseph's coat of many colors—Whigs, Know-nothings, Democrats, hard, soft-boiled, scrambled, and fried—Lincolnites, Douglasites, and blatherskites! I belong to no party; I am free, unbridled, unsaddled, in the political pasture. Like a big bobtailed bull in fly-time, I charge around in the high grass and fight my own flies. Gentlemen, let us show our liberality on patriotic occasions. Why, some men have no more patriotism than you could stuff in the eye of a knitting-needle. Let us not squeeze five cents till the eagle on it squeals like a locomotive or an old maid. Let us print the bills, and inform the country that we are as full of patriotism as Illinois swamps are of tadpoles."

Of course, these rhetorical instances are rare, but they are as characteristic of our people as Mulberry Sellers and his "millions," or Hon. Mr. Slote and his elevated thoughts of human liberty while sitting on the back of one negro, in the play, while his boots are blacked by another! We have orators who are witty, who do not need this extravagant wing for their flights. We have political orators who are quite sharp enough to make the speech Sheridan did to the shoe-makers of Stamford when asking their votes; and yet I doubt if they are not too sharp to risk such a fatal result of wit as he experienced. He was denounced by the irate shoe-makers for saying, "May the trade of Stamford be trampled underfoot of all the world!"

I once stood beside an American in the Crystal Palace in London, in 1851, when the great organ in the western transept struck up "Yankee Doodle." He said that two Bunker Hills were rising in his bosom! He could

not express himself otherwise, though the remark was palpably false.

There is something humorous in a lie, especially if it be a whopping one. It displays spirit and invention, and the size of it challenges our admiration, as if it were a Colossus. Impudence is at the bottom of it, and self-complacency helps it along.

That was hardly a creditable display of youthful impudence for the lively urchin who accosted a drug-store man the other day, "Mister, please gimme a stick licorice: your clerk goes with my sister." It shows a heart regardless of social duty, fatally bent on mischief, but is thoroughly complacent.

We dilate on every prospect, scientifically and individually, socially and politically. Miss Martineau, in her book on America, says that some of the most extraordinary instances of persons growing mentally awry are among the scholars who are thinly sprinkled in the Southern and Western settlements. When they first went upon the border they were wiser than any one else; and the impression of their own wisdom deepened with every accident of intercourse with those around them. She particularizes a phrenological professor, whose self-complacency was equal to his vanity. Lecturing his scholars on that science, and when on the topic of Burke's skull, he mentioned that it combined in the most perfect manner conceivable all grand intellectual and moral characteristics, adding that only one head has been known perfectly to resemble it. The students fix their admiring gaze on the professor's bald caput. He congratulates them on their scientific discernment. This was the scientific summit of impudent conceit.

We succeed in self-complacency and impudence.

Americans lack neither of these requisites. The coolest boy or man in the world is the imperturbable whittling Yankee. In this he copies and goes beyond the Norsemen. They had the same misty and grand way of saying things. The jokes of the Sagas were broad and immense. One of the old Scandinavian poets says that his hero had so big a beard that the birds made nests in it; and he makes the North Wind say that the distance was so great that when it attempted to blow an aspen, it couldn't blow a puff for days afterward. Our idea of the American eagle must be one with the Giant of Edda. He sits at the end of the world in eagle shape, and when he flaps his wings, all the winds come that blow on man. In the same spirit the American bounds his country on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the north by the aurora borealis, on the west by the setting sun, and on the south by the Day of Judgment.

There are a thousand instances, says Hazlitt, in "The Thousand and One Nights," which are an inexhaustible mine of comic humor and invention, and which from the manners of the East, which they describe, carry the principle of callous indifference in a jest as far as it can go. But Oriental humor is tame compared to our Norse-descended imperturbability.

These exaggerations are not, therefore, peculiar to America; they are composite; they are not merely made up of Norse poetry, but there is in them a strong flavor of Celtic imagery, and we know that the Celt is of the Orient, all radiant with the superlative. The search into the origin of our language and of our people does much to solve the problem of the origin of our humor, as of our institutions.

MORAL LESSONS ON OUR HUMOR.

In concluding this chapter, not to become didactic, but for the practical application of this analysis of our humor, let us make a few suggestions:

First. Our humor lacks refinement. Three-fourths of our humor will not bear rehearsal in the presence of women. Gentlemen, so called, even in the company of ladies, group together in a corner to chuckle over some "good one" which Smith or Jones has just heard, and thinks too good to be lost; or ladies, perhaps, will have their companions dragged off by the button-holing process to the hall, and soon after their ears are greeted by vociferous laughter. Indecency and Fun are old cronies. Horace, Ariosto, Montaigne, Sterne, Beaumont and Fletcher, and even Hogarth, prove it. We have in our list of patents a contrivance for cleaning smut out of wheat. If we would have superfine brands, we should employ it in our humor.

Joseph C. Neal, who wrote the "Charcoal Sketches," had a theory that those of humorous genius were more useful as moralists than the gravest preachers. Dare we make the application to our American humor?

Secondly. Our humor needs moderation. This it may have without losing its peculiarities. To accomplish this, we must study moderation in our business and our pleasures. We wear out too soon. More moderation would instill more veneration into our youth, give more emphasis to age, and inspire more awe of the sacred relations we sustain to our land, our race, and our God. The *otium* known in Roman days, when Cicero and Sallust retired from the forum and the baths of the imperial city to their sequestered villas at Baiæ, the repose which the

gentler amenities of interchange give to the mind, find no counterpart in our midst. Our summer resorts are themselves strung on extremes. We leave our homes to travel for relief, and are glad to hurry back to the partial tranquillity which they give.

With all our greatness, we should be great in a better sense. Action is sublime, but godlike is—repose! Our enjoyments in this life ought to antedate the future life. The clouds of unrest and fear, if they can not be dispelled in this our sphere, can be fringed with luminous beauty. Why should we care so much for the fleeting things which so warp our spirits and worry our life? If we think of it, our star is but a sand-grain in the vast spaces, and our little life but a watch-tick in the eternal years of God. Let us while we may, if not for our own, yet for the solace of others, gather the roses of hilarity, but not with such rude clutching as to destroy the plant or dissipate the fragrance.

There are some who think no one good or great who smiles, and others who think no one good or great who does not smile. Each believes in his peculiarity. The snail thinks his house a palace. This is natural and pleasant.

That was a good soul, though a German professor, who doubted if the great Prussian king could conjugate a Greek verb in *μι*.

But who wants the emotionless mental tints unquickened by sun or lightning? Who wants the half-raised eyebrow and half-smile, which deadens into a smirk?

There are those in our midst so tinctured with Puritanic austerity as to prefer frowns to dimples, who see nothing but levity in mirth, who find no manhood in the cheerful heart. There are others who dive deeper into

the philosophy of life, and, like the old philosopher, are ever ready to weep at the sorrows and even the joys of others. There are meditative men, who find thoughts too deep for tears in the flowers of the field. Far be it from me to detract from the respect which such grave intellects ever receive from the loftier intelligences of their time. To an Omniscient mind, holding in its grasp the infinite relations which every object, act, and thought sustains, perhaps our sincerest laughter is fraught with tears. But God has limited our vision. We see but in part; hence we see fragments, oddities, and incongruities; and Man alone, of all the animals, is made a laughing creature, to enjoy them when they come within the range of his vision.

Others, from similar generalizations, find motives for laughter in every thing, as if, in the eye of pure reason, short-sighted men were continually playing fantastic tricks, at which, as the Germans boldly aver, God laughs almightily.

But he who always laughs is reckoned not less foolish than he is considered mad who always wails. Nature, in her hill and dale, her night and day, her cloud and sunshine, teaches that wise alternation which is the golden mean between these extremes of mood. Let the earnest endeavor alternate with the cheerful heart. Let heroic performance join with the jubilant soul.

Thirdly. While we moderate, let us enlarge the domain of our humor. Need and greed are our presiding American spirits. If we can not exorcise them, let us at least turn from them more frequently. The brawn and muscle of America toil for us day after day, with how little cheer! These are the builders of our greatness. Why can not they have, as Thebes had, Orphic music as they build?

They deserve aureoles of joy around their sweating brows. Intellect and work have been too long divorced. The division of labor has been carried from economy into the social conditions of life, so that we hear of a class of thinkers and a class of operatives. Let the workman think and enjoy; let the thinker work and enjoy. Our literature seems to look to the fashionable city avenues for its success, and holds the mirror up to its denizens as if they were the essence and end of American manhood.

Our humor needs to be democratized. Our genteel laughter needs crossing with that of hearty toil. The one is becoming a "barren simper, a sniff and titter and snicker from the throat outward, producing some whiffling, husky cachinnation, as if laughing through wool"— a slow, formal unpuckering of its mouth under cambric, and half gurgling its enjoyment. Compare it with the laugh of labor, as Carlyle would describe it, "bursting forth like the neighing of all Tattersall's, tears streaming down the cheeks, foot clutched in air, long, long continuing, uncontrollable — a laugh not of the face and diaphragm only, but of the whole man, from head to heel."

There is no national platform like good humor. If the rich would make the poor forget their repugnancy, if the high would smooth the harsh prejudices of those below, let them cultivate good humor. The joke is a great union element. If velvet paw can only shake horny hand over a joke, velvet paw and horny hand are a community at once of equal franchises.

If our humor were thoroughly crossed and largely diffused, the treasons, stratagems, and spoils of politics would lose their terror; certainly sectional asperities and public discussions would lose their wrinkled front. From the forum, the street, the office, our humor would be

transplanted to the gardens of home. Thus purified around the hearth-stone and at the daily meal, it would unshadow our brow, and, along with those rarer blooms of domestic love, spread forth from its rich treasury of hue and aroma its graces to make the world less mournful.

V.

HUMORS AND THEIR SYNONYMS.

"E voi ridete? Certo ridiamo.—
Così fan tutti."

In a previous chapter the word "humor" was defined. Its derived sense was traced down to its present meaning. My present title is in the same vein, although the plural number, "humors," is rather ambiguous. *A* humor is not always the quality of the mind we call humor. A humor may be a particular mannerism; a humor may not be funny, but humor is. In the old days, when our language was plastic, and while it was being molded, any incongruity, caprice, or singularity was called a humor. No one word was ever more tortured; and yet all now understand it. It is not worth considering — as many have—whether a man's prevalent characteristic, or mood, is the result of his temperament; or by what term his native disposition should be called.

There is no real anomaly in humor. It is regulated by a law of eccentricity as much as reason. In its best demonstration, it *is* reason; at least, it is a species of wit, if not wit itself. "Every Man in his Humor" is the very comedy of life; but every man having a humor implies that humor is as much a portion of our common human nature as imagination.

I have already given the philology of the word "humor." Its synonyms are not less indicative of certain dignities and values. Nothing in derogation is meant,

when we trace it, further, from a Greek word, *ὑω*—"to rain"—or *humus*, the ground; or moisture, or juice, or liquor, or any thing else which by distillation becomes precious.

The rose is beautiful; but its perfume, or its "ottar," is almost beyond price. The important and essential natural elements are humors. Oxygen is the insoluble humor, the last molecule. The humors of the eye give us the glories of nature and the forms of friends. Water itself is humor, or liquid, though sometimes differently, or indifferently, regarded. The very word *jus* is juice, and justice is divine! It is especially and celestially elevated when poured out and impearled with the wit which sparkles upon the beaker's brim. Is it far-fetched to assume that these, our fountains of humorous philology, are fringed with flowers? or that their surface is embroidered by woven sunlight, checkered by the shadows of foliage? In plain words, these very definitions indicate the shine and health of generous natures. Sometimes, as the subordinate synonyms show, the sheen is dimmed; and often the health is spleen; but, even in its derivations and deviations, is not something of the origin of our subject still traceable? Follow the stream from its source—dashing out in wit (or knowledge); wandering at its own sweet will pleasingly, as in humor; sporting in caprice, caricature, jokes, and jests along the greensward; or playing in odd, quiet eddies and nooks, as in drollery and facetiæ; or dipping under-ground, as in *εἰρωνεία* (irony); or leaping and laughing with burlesque and buffoonery, in roaring cascades; or compacted between rough, bruising rocks, as in sarcasm; or seethingly irate, as in satire (*sat* and *ira*)—whatever may be the shades of meaning of these phrases, we will ignore the metaphysics, and out of

all "brilliant association and comparison" educe wit, and out of all "contrast and incongruity," humor. Thus, by combination, we reach a fair definition of the highest object of human expression, applied to life. We reach that which raises our nature above its level, by pleasant pictures and agreeable visions.

Our word-mongers may tell us that wit is spoken, while humor is both acted and spoken. But this confuses the *nomen generalissimum.* Whether acted or spoken; whether it is in a word, a gesture, or a wink, or in "brilliant flashes of silence;" whether it comes from learning, or whether it is common to all; whether it makes one smirk or smile; whether it is only verbal, as in a pun, or upon stilts, as in affected facetiousness; whether it postures and mimics, as in the artificial foolery of the African minstrel; whether it distorts to amuse, or, by feigned admiration and pleasant under-statement, it ridicules, like Socrates, or shows its teeth and bites the flesh, like a "vulture of the mind," as in satire, or in Juvenal; whether it insinuates and loves fun with the jocular, or makes and pokes fun with the jocose, or indulges in *plaisanterie* by personal raillery, or felicitously modifies its disparagement of others; whether it is defined by Locke, Swift, Shakspeare, Hobbes, Hazlitt, or Goldsmith, or by the unabridged chorus of all humorous literature—we know of it, as the well-named poet, Gay, says of it, that it ever moves our airy senses to pleasant laughter.

All we care to know, for this analysis, is that this element is a bias of the mind, depending neither on culture nor affectation, but on solid human nature, in all its conditions and societies.

When, therefore, this chapter is headed "Humors," it is meant to comprehend not alone the collective idiosyn-

crasy of bodies of men, but the peculiar fancies, fun, wit, and manners which obtain with the individual members of society.

What an endless opportunity is here to study the changeful phases of human life! When all the interests of freedom and property are in question; when vanity, selfishness, pride, and power are in constant mental scuffle, there must be evolved a mosaic of infinite hue and configuration. Modern chemistry, outvying ancient skill, has set aside the natural marble and shell for the mosaic, and has given fresh beauty and added vivacity to this branch of art; so that our transparent enamels now furnish seventeen thousand shades of color. The looms for the Gobelin tapestry bewilder the beholder with their infinitesimal gradations of hue. How have the seven hues of the prism been modified and multiplied by genius and patience! Yet who can compare such finite displays of mere outward art to the endless variety of emotions which moves the muscle and charms the mind by the piquant attrition of mind with mind in the society of gifted men?

As in the human body, so in deliberative bodies—the more violent the fit, either of laughter or anger, the more complete and general are the union and movement of the muscles. What a combination of muscles of the face alone is required to wreathe it in smiles! Sixteen muscles join in jollity, from the *occipito-frontalis* to the *compressor nasi;* from the *zygomaticus,* which makes a smile to write it, to the *platysma myodes,* which makes another to pronounce it. Then the forehead and eyebrow play their part, as leading members, while the *corrugator supercilii,* as its caustic name signifies, accompanies the nasal group in a smile with a most French-like, if not sarcastic, shrug. Then the eye! Imagine a man laughing

without his eyes as coadjutors! One should be afraid of him who can not, or does not, peep, if not shut his eyes, in the act. An open-eyed laugh is a fraud. He who thus laughs has a demon. This ocular group, like seven sisters, holding each other by the hand lovingly, now dancing obliquely and now to the front, up, down, and around—these help, like the body of an assembly, the mouth, the centre of expression. This organ is the object of most interest; for is it not the orator of every occasion? Out of it proceed the curse and the kiss, much bitterness, but much blessing. From it came the revilings of the Judean mob and the beatitudes of the Mount. Who is it that calls the lips "tell-tales?" It is meant in no superficial sense; for as the years wane, and passions have shaped their form and surroundings, they tell the tale of good humor as well as bad. A continued series of lip-movements forms a habit which no affectation or hypocrisy can hide. There is much expression in the eye; but for the generous and frank, the tender and true, the dimpling delight and darling solicitude, commend us to the mouth!

Yet all these muscles, with their laughing functions, and the others which wait on them, from top to toe, are almost expressionless in repose. Start or startle them with a pleasant idea, and how their defiant music rises, out of almost noiseless chuckle, into a resounding diapason like the league-long laugh of the breakers upon the shore! So, too, as in the physical body, on some occasions the muscles are rigid and serene, while on others they are as mobile and contortionate as those of the stage-tumbler, of whom we are never sure when he will be on head or heels. And the analogy holds with assemblies.

VI.

LEGISLATIVE AND ORATORICAL HUMORS—ARE THEY LOST ARTS?

"The golden chain of Jove was nothing but a succession of laughs —a chromatic scale of merriment, reaching from earth to Olympus." —DOUGLAS JERROLD.

TAKING up the thread from the preceding chapter, it may be said that certain legislatures have had peculiar humors and characteristics. One is intellectual, one industrious, one stupid, one jolly, one lazy, one fond of this or that recreation; and on different days, and at different hours, such collective bodies, like our human bodies, show peculiar sensibilities. We have known speakers, chairmen of committees—the whole House itself—in its every muscular and mental fibre, to be so cross one day that they could not deliberate, and so jocund on another that they would not work. The Speaker may be dyspeptic one day and the House good-natured, or *vice versâ*. On one day the *depressor alæ nasi* is active, and on another the *buccinator;* and as one or the other predominates, so the House has its shades, or, rather, varied lights, of humor. All will agree, however, that legislatures have an individuality. We call them good, or bad, or average, according to their work, mood, and ability. The best of these bodies, however, is good-tempered, even when not so able. In the time of Henry IV. one parliament was styled *Parliamentum Indoctorum*, or the Lack-learning Parliament. It was this Parliament that

went in a body to the king to ask that the clergy be obliged to pay a part of the taxes out of their estates. The Archbishop of Canterbury, being present, said, "To strip the clergy thus would put a stop to their prayers." Upon this, Mr. Speaker Esturmy, the founder of the Somersets, smiling, said, "The prayers of the Church, I fear, are a slender supply." We are not told how his grace took the allusion, but his majesty (Prince Hal) evidently smiled; for are we not told that the Speaker at that time had been appointed chief butler to the king? He who furnished the wit furnished the wine. If this Parliament, presided over by this lover of wine and maker of wit, was the illiterate parliament, we need more such parliaments, for its members voted against making themselves collectors of subsidies, and made the interests of their constituents their own! "At the same time," says Walsingham, "they took care that no useless grants or pensions should be made from the crown to impoverish the revenue." And we may add that they had a speaker who scorned political danger when ruin and death encompassed him. Besides, he did not disdain to "smile." *Tout cela est changé.* The Speaker must now be as grave as a tombstone. If such results flow from illiterate parliaments and witty speakers, let us have congresses of less pretension, and speakers with genial souls!

Properly to show these collective and individual humors, we take the license of the subject to call in precedent and illustration from all legislatures. Thus the ludicrous incongruities of assemblies of men, as well as their individual eccentricities, may be properly bundled in one plural noun—"humors."

In considering the humor of a deliberative body, often engaged in friendly contest, and liable at a moment to

be whirled out of eddies of good temper into the turbulent and yellow currents of partisan spite and personal antagonisms, great allowances are to be made in deciding upon the flavor or genuineness of the brand of humor. It is no test that the spoken word is a momentary hit, or that the hit hurts, or that the victim winces. The wit may give a temporary delight and exaltation, and the humor may be enjoyed by the victor. A better test to be applied to the parentheses of "laughter" as well as "cheers" is that of time. The best test, as I have urged, is translatability into a foreign tongue. The "laughter of hate and the hisses of scorn" which burden our Congressional literature are not the highest evidences of the best humor or of genuine wit. It was not always that Randolph's sarcasm, Tristam Burgess's invective, John P. Hale's waggery, Thaddeus Stevens's irony, old Ben Hardin's fun, Corwin's drollery, Senator Edmunds's epigram, or General Nye's anecdote, produced unanimous good spirit. Such results are generally won upon themes outside of party polemics. They are attained only when the object of the humor agrees with both sides and with the orator.

Sometimes the loudest laughter is provoked by the emptiest conceit. When examined, the conceit is found to be a gushing boast of consistency, or an empty anticipation of victory; and this, owing to the vicissitudes of politics, is a ticklish theme for vaticination.

When a gifted member of Congress, before the terrible thrashing of his party in 1840, amused the House by representing a Democrat as one whom he met going out to hew wooden razors with a broad-axe to shave dead Whigs with in the fall, one fails to discern either the congruity of the metaphors or the brilliancy of the wit, though

the fun that followed fast followed still faster when it was said that their hard cider would turn into sour milk, which was a little acidulous then, and would be very sour when the elections ended! Alas for the prophetic humor of the sanguine and impulsive hustings, and of the temporary "spanking" majority!

There is a humor which, even when genuine, makes one melancholy. Swift's wit made Thackeray sad. In an assembly representing the whole people one must not expect the superfine, or always the fine, or even middling brands. In such an assembly all classes of minds meet, especially extremes. One might apply to it the *bon mot* of Jerrold: A *gourmet* asks a company to guess what had been his dinner? They fail to guess. "Why, calf's-head soup!" "Ah," said the wit, "extremes meet." Legislative bodies are not exempt, collectively and individually, from Shakspeare's description:

> "Nature hath fram'd strange fellows in her time;
> Some that will evermore peep through their eyes,
> And laugh, like parrots, at a bagpiper;
> And other of such vinegar aspect
> That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile,
> Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable."

In a body as grave as Congress, the fun is not always and at once apparent. The gravity of such a body precludes levity. A child's toy may ripple the pond, but Neptune only arouses a tumult on the sea. It requires an effort to overcome ponderosity. To *raise* a laugh is to lift the weight of dignity—nay, to lift the weight off of dignity. Humor always starts handicapped in large assemblies. Upon their proceedings hang, not trifles, but momentous things. But may not the very froth and sparkle of the wave indicate its strength and depth? He

only is a philosopher who, looking at the sea, not only dives into its imperturbable profundity, but observes its eccentric currents and superficial buoyancy. No one should underrate the dignity and influence of a Congress like ours, representing, as it does to-day, nearly a half-hundred millions, with a history nearly centennial, and speaking for a territory having such varied and discordant interests, because evidences of humor were not apparent in its earliest period. Is it a vain ceremony to open the deliberations of such a body with prayer to the Supreme Being? Even when the nation numbered but three or four millions, and but a third of the present number of States, it was laying the foundation of empires. There was a solemnity about its first assemblages.

OUR REVOLUTIONARY HUMOR.

The first Congress met in the spring of 1789. Nearly a month elapsed before it had a quorum. Its first act was no jocular matter—that of counting the votes of the electors which proclaimed "George Washington, Esq.," President of the young republic. It was in no playful mood that Congress declared him our *first President.* A few days afterward, Federal Hall, at the corner of Nassau and Wall streets, New York City, was tendered to this grave body. Soon thereafter the rules for its conduct were adopted. Were there no smiling *genii*, such as are conversant with our recent Congresses, to squint a roguish eye from a reporters' gallery at that solemn primary rule "that no member should speak to another, or read any printed paper, when any member is speaking?"

There were great anxieties in that opening Congress. In very deed, the "eyes of the world" were directed to it. The effervescence of the festive writers of our day

would have been strangely out of place there. Under most interesting associations, and into that octagonal hall, whose damask hangings gave richness and tone to the scene, and attended to the gallery in front of the Senate-chamber by John Adams, the Vice-president, and Senators, and by Mr. Speaker Muhlenberg and the Representatives, there is ushered the august form of Washington. The oath is administered by the Chancellor of New York. Proclamation is made: "Long live George Washington, President of the United States!" The solemn consecrations then begin for the American Congress. The weighty and untried duties, the dangers of disunited counsels, the invocation to the Divine Parent of social order and of the human race—these give added concern, fear, and piety to the momentous ceremony of this crucial period and the deliberations of our first Congress.

Was there nothing to relieve the serious dignity of these solemn proceedings? Was the triumphal progress of Washington from Mount Vernon to New York only a solemn and sacred pilgrimage? Where was Hopkinson? Was his comic muse, that had sung the "Battle of the Kegs," mute? The truth is that there was something like a sporadic laugh here and there, and even indecorously, as we now think, at *Pater Patriæ* himself. The aristocratic pretensions of some of the fussy actors, and their efforts to ape royalty in preparing for the inauguration, with its pomp and show, brought out many a jest. Federal Hall was a sort of Athenian στοά. There the gossip and wit of New York met. There, as even now, at the corner of Wall and Nassau, speculators most did congregate. It was their Rialto. How these plebeians ridiculed the anxious patricians, bent on decorations, titles, and places of honor! In a letter from John Armstrong

to General Gates this is more than hinted. Even Roger Sherman endeavored to devise some style of address more novel and dignified than "Excellency." We are told that a caricature appeared called "The Entry," and that it was full of "profane allusions." It represented Washington mounted on an ass, and in the arms of his man Billy, Humphreys leading the jack, and chanting hosannas.

This humor had some foundation for its fun. It gathered in the lobbies of Federal Hall, crept crinkling into Congress, and had its amusing influence on legislation. Dr. Griswold, in his *Republican Court*, tells a Congressional anecdote at the expense of Washington, in relation to his title:

"General Muhlenberg states that Washington himself was in favor of the style of 'High Mightiness,' used by the Stadtholder of Holland, and that while the subject was under discussion in Congress he dined with the President, and, by a jest about it, for a time lost his friendship. Among the guests was Mr. Wynkoop, of Pennsylvania, who was noticeable for his large and commanding figure. The resolutions before the two Houses being referred to, the President, in his usual dignified manner, said, 'Well, General Muhlenberg, what do you think of the title of High Mightiness?' Muhlenberg answered, laughing, 'Why, general, if we were certain that the office would always be held by men as large as yourself or my friend Wynkoop, it would be appropriate enough; but if by chance a President as small as my opposite neighbor should be elected, it would become ridiculous.' This evasive reply excited some merriment about the table; but the chief looked grave, and his evident displeasure was increased soon after by Muhlenberg's vote in the

House of Representatives against conferring any title whatever upon the President."

This is not the first time the point has been made on titles. It was again made by a Pennsylvanian in 1852. The accomplished member from the Quaker City, Joseph R. Chandler, proposed to insert "lord" before "lieutenant-general," as a further feather in General Scott's cap. "If we do any thing," he argued, "let us give the poetry that belongs to the old heraldry of the nobility which our fathers threw off when they framed this plain, drab-colored Constitution."

The wit of Mr. Chandler was more acceptable than that of his predecessor. Indeed, the Revolutionary days are in this particular in marked contrast with the present. Many a time have I heard, in a call of the House, amidst all possible confusion, irreverent jokes about "George," and propositions of mock patriotism, such as to read the "Farewell Address." They made the House irreverently jubilant.

M. Brissot, a traveling French gentleman of that day, wrote that the presence of Congress in New York contributed much to extend the ravages of luxury, including the habit of smoking, which had not disappeared with other Dutch customs; "for they use cigars," he said, "without the use of an instrument, as it accustoms to meditation and prevents loquacity." Happy, hilarious habit! No previous question; only a smoke to second the demand against loquacity.

Mr. Niles, in his preface to his "Register," in 1816, says that the patriots of the Revolution did not make speeches to be unattended to by their brethren in Congress, and fill up the columns of a newspaper; that they only spoke when they had something to say, and pre-

ferred acting to talking—very unlike the legislators of the present time. The speeches, which were soul-stirring then, were pronounced to be heard, and not to be published. But while he grows thus indignant over the voluble patriots of 1816, he takes care to prove that if our early Congress did not themselves have and express humor, they were, like Falstaff, the cause of it in others. Mr. Niles is pleased to recall this trenchant anecdote of that early day: The Earl of Dartmouth asked an American in London of how many members the first Congress consisted. The reply was, "Fifty-two." "Why, that is the number of cards in a pack," said his lordship. "How many *knaves* are there?" "Not one," returned the republican. "Please to recollect that *knaves* are *court*-cards."

Certainly our early Congressmen did not lack humor. We may lack many of the *evidences* of this humor, for the debates which followed for many years after this first inauguration, either because the stenographers were not abroad, or because of the brevity and meagreness of the records, show little or none of the pyrotechnics with which the press of to-day scintillates, and none of the boisterous brackets which indicate the mirthful provocation. Even our best Revolutionary humorist, Franklin, clothed his fun in allegory and story. Indeed, the Senate sat with closed doors for five years after its organization. It was a secret body for all business, executive and legislative. The record which transpired is all too brief of those years. It does not indicate whether the fathers held high carnival in their seclusion, or, if they did, how they held it. We are left to conjecture. Were they always pompous and sedate? May not the builders of our Government, like those of other Govern-

ments, have had their rejoicings? Out of their exuberant spirits, may not Momus have had his heyday? Thebes is fabled to have been built to the music of Amphion. The myth is full of meaning. No labor was ever done, no city or government ever built, without joy to make melody in the heart of the builder. If the thews and sinews of our workmen become more pliant with more pleasure, if the very boatmen on our ships sing their roundelays as they pile in the coal to make the steam come and the steamer go, why may not our political architects and workmen have had their jubilation as they wrought plinth, architrave, column, and dome of the political temple?

If we are to believe that fun belongs only to our time, and that its *esprit* and extravagance are limited to one country, then the rollicking effrontery of Aristophanes and the easy pleasantries of Plautus are not laughable. Or, not to go too far back, let us reject the comic delineations of Florentine life by Ginguené, and the humorous extravagances of Peter Aretin, even though Hallam crystallizes them as shining specimens of humor.

We can not believe our early statesmen insensible to humor. We would not thus detract from their fame. Our recent senates have been called fog-banks. This appellation is less invidious when applied to the sessions of the early senates, as they were enveloped in secrecy. But when we reflect that our Senate is dull at times, because a foggy speech is being read to empty chairs, and when its giants are in committee-rooms and libraries, fabricating their armor, is it less reasonable to believe that our early representative men had their merry moods within the adytum—all the merrier, if we may believe in reports, for the secrecy? Nor will we believe in the dullness of our earlier debates because the evidences are not

as abundant as they are now of humor in deliberation. Spice has done much for the mummy. Cheops survives, embalmed.

HUMOR CLASSICAL AND UNIVERSAL.

Cicero was a wit, and certainly a punster. Cæsar collected his puns. We have no account of his repartees in debate; but the Roman Senate must now and then have smiled at the sharp pricking which he gave a senator who was the son of a tailor: "*Rem acu tetigisti.*" In spite of his verbose writing, and what Montaigne calls his tedious languish, he could "take off" the paper cap of a cook by a play on the word "quoque," or on the word "jure," which means juice or soup! "*Ego quoque tibi jure favebo.*"

A question has been raised, by an ambiguous remark of the Elder Disraeli as to Cicero's fatness or leanness. But whatever his bodily habit, in one respect he was given to his ease, and, like such men, had much levity. Whether, with his *copia loquendi*, in public he used the facetious—like some of his admirers—we are at a loss to determine by his speeches. We shall hereafter determine it by another test, to wit, his versatile and abounding intellect.

Because the reported orations of the bema or the forum show no humor, does it follow that they evoked no laughter, and that the faculty of fun was wanting in the ancients? Why may we not fancy Cicero rolling out an *ad absurdum* on his antagonist, or Æschines, fresh from the theatre, making a pithy point against Demosthenes? In those climes where the bright azure sky produces a race permeable to fun, a race overfond of grimace and demonstration, ready with mimicry and quick to see the

ludicrous, can it be that no odd quirk, apt anecdote, or telling *ad hominem* gavé vivacity to debate?

True, Rome was engaged in the serious work of conquest. She was building empire. Not for her was the chisel or the brush. But was there not a lute behind Cicero to give the key to his tones as he launched his thunders from the forum? He who studied to please could not omit the graces of wit. The art of speech is above all arts. The Greeks had it in richer abundance than the Romans. The creative power is not always the ruling power. The Romans had the rôle of ruling. They did it by the *fasces* and the bridge of gold for the retreating foe.

> "Thine, Roman, thine to rule
> A conquered world, to give just laws to peace,
> To spare the humble foe, resist the proud."

But while the Greeks were creators in art, was the genius which ruled by conciliation wanting in geniality?

There are—there must be—lost arts in the domain of senatorial humor. We have lost arts in poetry, painting, sculpture, and mechanics. Tribes and nations have come and gone. Through the centuries, migrations, like the grand exodus from Europe to America, have changed the face of society, and only folk-lore and fairy-talk, legend and tradition, remain to hint of lost systems and literatures. There is little new, except our chemistry; and much of that may be as ancient as the Pyramids. Cinderella's slipper is traced back to the Veda; Æsop had read Buddha; William Tell dwells in the chronicles of nearly all nations; and the apple of his archery is nearly as old as that of Eden. Even Toledo to-day, with all the appliances of modern chemistry, can not produce the famous blade of Saladin, which cut his gauzy scarf in the

air. If this art is lost, may there not once have been—and have been lost too, or at least hidden from us—the elegant art of repartee, more exquisite than the Oriental cimeter? May not the thunders of the Agora have had electric flashes of wit? Were there no "arsenals" to be shaken by fulminations of fun? Wendell Phillips has said that the best part of our wit is ancient, and that we only reproduce what is gone. Perhaps the parliamentary pleasantry which insists that it can not furnish brains to the stupid opponent, or the ruling of the Speaker who sees the pungency, but not the personality, in the questionable remark of an honorable gentleman, may, for aught we know, be stereotyped on the crockery tablets of an Assyrian council, or written in the hieroglyphs of some Egyptian record. Perhaps some Champollion or Smith may yet educe from the dead past Assyrian bulls more amusing than those of Sir Boyle Roche, and burlesque more exaggerative than that of Proctor Knott. If so, *a fortiori*, may we not believe that our earlier Congressmen had their weapons keenly tempered by ridicule; and that neither in their cups and committees nor in open discussion were they wanting in the fine sense of the humorous?

Humor is perennial and immortal. It will reproduce itself. It was only a session or so ago that Mr. Archer, of Maryland, whose name on the roll came after that of Oakes Ames, having voted by mistake when Mr. Ames's name was called, voted again when his own name was called. He was saluted by the poetic apostrophe, "Insatiate Archer! could not one suffice?" He was quick to rejoin: "A better *archer* would have had better *aims*." And yet, knowing that wit to be original, what was my surprise to find, in an old newspaper of 1825, the same

remark from John Randolph to Mr. Archer's relative, then a Virginian member, who had asked a *second* day to continue his debate on the Bankrupt Bill!

Humor is as repetitious as reason. It knows no clime or assembly. Laughter is as immortal as the gods. It knows no age. The babe laughs in its little bed. Why not babyhood in the cradle of the world? We read that the boys in Damascus clamber into the plane-trees to have their fun at the procession going under them bearing the *mahmal*, the gilded case in which the *kismet* is taken to Mecca. They tickle the nose of the magnificent camel which bears the sacred emblem. Yet these Damascene youths, who have—as all boys have—mirth for a playmate, when they grow up and become cadis, pretend to gravity and cultivate obesity! Are they, then, as near to sinlessness and greatness as when in their shadowless youth they tickle the sacred camel from the limbs of a sycamore? Humor is natural; gravity and fat are artificial; and nature is power and progress.

It was said by an eminent editor, "Young man, go West!" Let us say, "Young man, go East! Go to the Porte! Become portly! If you would rise in the world and become a dignitary, go to a semi-barbarous, unparliamentary land; grow stout, and cease to smile!" But if you would be a ruler among the living and growing civilizations, take your lesson from the lispless lips and laughing face of the cherub in the cradle; for those lips may give command to the future state. The happy urchin, whose fun makes music for his band of boys, romping under a cloudless sky, may have the potential word in tempestuous debate.

It will be difficult to believe that in the ancient legislatures there were no Tom Duncombes or Bernal Os-

bornes, no Palmerstons and Disraelis, no Hales or Stevenses. What can you think of a Spanish Cortes, without its Randolph and Burgess? Its gravity without them would be intolerable. There is no curule chair which can restrain mirthfulness; no tribune to make the French Deputy's face as rigid as your "grandam cut in alabaster." If he can not have his laugh with you, he will, as a true French wit, have it at you; for was it not a Frenchman who said that certain savages worship the devil, and neglect the "bon Dieu," because the devil is spiteful, and the "bon Dieu" is too beneficent to injure them?

We are not ready to credit the marvel that the Gauls who invaded the Roman Senate found only serious faces and iron diaphragms. Did their dignified decorum scare the barbarian into awe, and thus save Rome? We doubt it. Why, such an irruption into one of our legislatures, North or South, would be received with guffaws. Our State-houses would ring again. Many a "hole in the wall" would echo to the convivial shouts of the victor and vanquished. We are not left wholly to our imagination, as was Shakspeare, about the dust of Cæsar, when we speak of ancient oratory associated with humor. Wits and warriors were before Agamemnon. Are we not told by Homer that among the kings of Greece, when fighting against Troy, one at least in their councils—Thersites—made fun of the lazy, dilatory, and mercenary heroes, who did a great deal of bragging about a very little fighting, not to speak of bagging gold and decoying damsels? Yet, twice in our Congressional history has this exemplary Homeric coruscation flashed, at the expense of Thersites and some honorable member to whom he has been likened. We do not now defend or applaud Thersites. He may have been a bully and a buffoon, as

he was by some regarded; and for his contumacious and contemptuous snarling at the laggard warriors he may have deserved to be knocked down and pounded by the sceptre of Ulysses, and finally killed, as he was, by an irate, long-haired Grecian. But even Thersites had his use as a public declaimer; for all translators agree that he moved the Greeks to laughter! He is an illustration of the value of witty retort as well as of the utility of honest torment. Such men as Corwin, Nye, Butler, and Proctor Knott have their uses; for they kill abuses by a sure weapon, ridicule. If Thersites can be rescued from his bad fame, which I shall attempt in a chapter on classic humor, then precious indeed to the state and to society is the inextinguishable laughter which follows truthful, droll, and pungent speech!

VII.

HUMOR—IS IT A TEST OF TRUTH, OR GREATNESS?

"Wit lies mostly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting them together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy."—LOCKE'S *Essays*.

No one, except the most jaundiced, but will confess that the talent for wit or humor is one of the most potential in influencing men, and especially bodies of men. If administration or legislation consists in understanding how to thread the avenues to the heart, if to please is to rule, who will account such a gift useless in human society? Those who most depreciate the talent are those who are void of it. Lord Froth, in the "Double Dealer," says, "There is nothing more unbecoming a man of quality than to laugh; 'tis vulgar. Every body can laugh. Then, especially, to laugh at the jest of an inferior person! Now, when I laugh, I always laugh alone." False logic about humor is as silly as the foppish Froth, and as old as Hobbes. Hobbes held that laughter was a demoniac pride. It came out of the arrogance of men. He thought that men laughed because they felt that they were better, smarter, or more powerful than others. They either saw farther into matters, or else the inferiority and infirmity of others were a proof of their own superiority and grace. He confesses that mirth and laughter are proper, but proper only to comedy and satire. He plainly indicates that great persons that have their minds

employed on great designs have not leisure enough to laugh, or are too much absorbed with the contemplation of their own power and virtues. "Such eminent worthies," he holds, "do not need the infirmities and vices of other men to recommend themselves to their own favor by comparison, as all men do when they laugh." We wonder whether "Tom Corwin," the orator and statesman, an accomplished advocate and an able Secretary of the Treasury, could have read Hobbes, and then have dared to joke a scoundrel out of office or a political vice out of existence! Before he died he told a friend that he would only be remembered after death as a clown. Perhaps this was one of his own pleasantries; for he is best remembered, as is Webster, by those graces which flowed from his genial heart. The writer is not unaware that however much one may cipher and work in dry, statistical, and syllogistic debate, no one regards him for the laborious days and studious nights because on some odd occasion he may have killed a bill by a playful allusion. The utility of the humor is rarely considered and appreciated. Some men, however, have their compensation for being laughed at, by assuming the grandeur of Pythagorean expression and the solemn mien of Lord Burleigh. They are the Pharisees of society, with long faces and broad phylacteries. It is your good Samaritan who spends his two-pence of frivolity, and pours the oil of humor into the wounds of life.

If Madame De Staël could see little in Shakspeare but puerility, bombast, absurdity, and *grossièretés;* if she overshadowed his sublime and pathetic passages by what she considered his buffooneries—the shade of Corwin should rest content under the willows of Lebanon. Will common or æsthetic sense never see the necessity of lights

as well as shades? Will it persist in calling that a blot which is a shadow, and that an extravagance of levity which is a luminous beauty? "No great men are jocose," intimates the surly Hobbes. Let the roll of Parliamentary worthies be called. Who will then say that this gift of humor is inconsistent with studious labor and far-reaching statesmanship? Call the roll! Sir Thomas More, Selwyn, Pitt, Fox, Canning, Grattan, O'Connell, Palmerston, and Disraeli. Even Madame De Staël, in her day, found more logical sarcasm in Parliament than rhetorical flourish. She really began to like the eloquence which detected sophistry and enforced truth. Who denies to Sir Thomas More, either as Speaker of the Commons or Chancellor, as polemic or man, inherent greatness? Yet his jocundity was used constantly as a mask for a wise purpose. He was censured for his gravity of demeanor; but every one who looked on his face could detect the constitutional disposition to be merry. He is not the only wit who died with the ruling passion. Rabelais and Wycherley are said to have joked in the article of death. They had their mirthful misery as abundant as that of the Spanish beggar. When committed for treason, to the executioner More exclaimed, "Ah, if you chop my head off, save my beard! That, at least, is innocent of crime." Yet much of his humor dropped from his tongue when he seemed most grave. He said that he loved to tell his mind more merrily than more solemnly to preach. Jests to him were but sauce; and it were but an absurd banquet in which there were few dishes of meat and much variety of sauces. It was to him, however, an unpleasant feast where there was no sauce at all. Yet this rare scholar, honest officer, poor gentleman, busy Chancellor, and racy Speaker of the

Commons, was accounted worthy of martyrdom for the sense which lay beneath his quips and cranks.

To my mind, there never was so good a practical joke, so "saucy" an expedient, as that which Mr. Speaker More prepared at the expense of Cardinal Wolsey. More was a friend of liberty. He believed in the privileges of the Commons. He opposed a royal budget when a beardless burgess. Once the Commons over which he dominated irritated Wolsey. The cardinal came down in person to the House with all the pomp and blazonry of his office. In he comes, with his seven silver pillars, his maces, his pole-axes, his crosses, his hat, and his great seal. He makes a solemn oration to the House. The House receives him, by preconcert, in dead silence. All are mute. The word "parliament" means "parley," "talk;" yet this body was humbly, jocosely, curiously dumb. The cardinal turns to More. He remembers that the Speaker is the mouth-piece, by the English Constitution, of the Commons. More explains that such a presence and such insignia strike them into the eternal silences! Tacita is queen, and yet free speech rules! When Wolsey left, there must have been a jolly roar.

There have been speakers since who might have ruled the waves of debate with equal wisdom by taking lessons in taciturnity. Our speakers now are as noisy with the gavel as the House is with its caviling clamor. Dignity in the chair consists too often now in elevated monotones and perpetual rapping.

In Harry the Fourth's time, one of the speakers was named Tiploft. He obtained a grant of "harness for peace and war, as well as for great horses called coursers, and saddles for tilts and tournaments." Was this grant a joke? Imagine Mr. Speaker tilting down through the

corridors of the Capitol, or down the aisles of the House, with lance or battle-axe, to enforce the previous question!

As a preservative of order, and otherwise, such a romantic performance would be more effectual, and more interesting to the galleries, than our present mode of enforcing the rules. I recall an occasion when Mr. Jones, of Tennessee, exclaimed, "Did any body on the face of the almighty earth ever before see such legislative proceedings as we have had the last two days?" To which the Speaker demurely said, "It is not a question for the chair to answer." And then a fresh

> "Burst of laughter, like the electric beam,
> Shook all the audience, but it was *at* him."

It is not true that the humorist is necessarily a frivolous person. He commands by the potency of his wit. It may be true that the *mere* humorist is frivolous. You can not carve a great man out of him any more than a colossus out of a pebble. The mere wit is very near a fool. Nor does it follow that because the mere wit is foolish and light, the real wit is not the concomitant of wisdom and greatness. All great wits are not great men, but all great men are witty. On this thesis we pit Sydney Smith against Hobbes. That divine intimates that it is seldom that wit is the eminent quality of any man. It is commonly accompanied by many other talents, and ought to be considered as evidence of a superior understanding. He instances almost all the great poets, orators, and statesmen of all times—Cæsar, Alexander, Aristotle, Descartes, and Lord Bacon; Cicero, Shakspeare, Demosthenes, Boileau, Pope, Dryden, Fontenelle, Jonson, Waller, Cowley, Solon, Socrates, Dr. Johnson; and almost every man who has been distinguished in the House of

Commons. Had he lived later, his list would have been longer. A friend of mine challenged the idea that great wit to greatness was always nearly allied. He named George Washington as lacking this sense of humor. Washington was aristocratic, but not too starched for humor. How lordly he unbent when he did unbend! Irving, in his "Life of Washington," says that he found but few sportive allusions in Washington's correspondence. He gives one only in his third volume. It is an invitation to some lady friends to dine with him at his quarters on the Highlands. The fun is not overdone, and there is not much of it. It consists of an elaborate picture of the scanty meal, in which the dishes and meats, in meagre array, like a small force of untrained militia, are scattered over the board!

Let us return to our legislative examples. Silas Wright is called the "Cato of America;" but was there ever a man more readily risible? Judge Douglas I knew intimately. His mind was as fully stored with anecdote, and as radiant with mirth, as that of his great competitor, Lincoln. Crittenden, of Kentucky, with whom I served on committee, had the same subtle quality. Many a time during the war, at the table of Governor Seward, have I listened to their mutual wanton wiles and infinite jests. The recorded humor of these giants is, however, sparse.

WEBSTER, CLAY, AND CALHOUN.

If called upon to name our three great public men who shone most in public debate, Calhoun, Webster, and Clay, the triumvirate of the Senate, trip to the tongue. Were these men too serious for jest? Were their stately *aplomb* and unassuming pomp in the forum ever relieved by the fantasies of humor? To deny them this quality is to ren-

der their hold on public opinion a mystery, if not a mistake. Each of them had this quality, not in that eminent degree which overshadows the solid parts of the understanding, but ever ready to flash out when that weapon was the proper one for forensic success. It was my fortune to hear but one of this triumvirate, Webster, and then in his most solemn vein. But if he transmitted one tithe of his humor to his son Fletcher, the father had a richer treasury of this ringing currency than he had of some other more advantageous resources. Did he reserve his great fund of humor for his hours of ease and conviviality? How much soever of this interesting quality he possessed, he often used it in public. Mr. Curtis, in his preface to the life of Webster, says that his great intellectual endowments and conspicuous civil functions were united with a character of equally marked peculiarities. Among these peculiarities, to which Mr. Curtis does not give sufficient emphasis, was his sensibility to the humorous. Why do our biographers so depreciate that which we most desire to remember? "Peculiarity" is almost a definition of humor; and if Webster be most vividly and fondly remembered for any thing, it is for these peculiarities. Doubtless first among the loving traits of all great men is a quick appreciation of the absurd and angular phases of life. As my theme does not take me into private life, it will suffice if there be discovered in the public debater this element. Where do I find it? Go to the matchless masterpiece of modern eloquence, Webster's reply to Hayne. His biographer properly characterizes this memorable oration. He compares it, not unjustly, with that of Demosthenes on the crown. It was not only great as a protest against the "oppugnation" of South Carolina, and as an explanation of the

Constitution, but both for plainness of speech and splendor of imagery it is unrivaled in the annals of oratory. It was spoken from notes, and not without forethought. Would that it had been fully reported! Did he disdain on this great occasion to harness his humorous faculty? Even the notes of this speech, to say nothing of the traditions of its delivery, indicate that he rallied his opponent wittily, turning the Banquo ghost allusion against him, and then made a grotesque and laughable picture of the militia of South Carolina marching upon the custom-house and overthrowing the United States! Mr. Curtis calls this only a lighter tone of illustration, running out the practical application of the South Carolina doctrine into the inconvenient consequences of treason. Whatever it was, it was effective, for it was fun in the traces of ratiocination.

But we have proofs in plenty of Webster's love of the humorous. When his ambition had been disappointed, and infirmity fell upon him at Marshfield in 1852, we catch now and then little gleams of sportiveness even in his last petulant talks. "I care," said he to his biographer, "no more about politics than the jackdaw that sits on the top of St. Paul's;" and then he repeated some of Cowper's lines on that interesting bird:

> "He sees that this great roundabout,
> The world, with all its motley rout,
> Church, army, physic, law,
> Its customs and its businesses,
> Is no concern at all of his,
> And says—what says he?—Caw!"

Almost in his dying moments, finding his nurse still up at his side, he exclaimed, "That *everlasting* Sarah is still there!"

Mr. Webster was in President Harrison's Cabinet.

Harrison never forgot his Plutarch. This his inaugural showed. It was full of classic allusions. Mr. Webster was to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Seaton; but as he was to see President Harrison by appointment, and talk over his inaugural, he begged Mrs. Seaton not to delay dinner on his account, though he would come as near the hour as possible. He was nearly an hour late, and appeared quite fatigued when he entered. In his slow and dry way, he told of his interview with the President elect, and spoke of the number of allusions which the inaugural contained to the heroes commemorated by Plutarch. "I found the President very tenacious, madam," said Mr. Webster, addressing Mrs. Seaton.

"You labored very hard, no doubt," replied the lady, "to have the inaugural all that is expected, I know, for you appear very much fatigued."

"Fatigued, madam!" rejoined Mr. Webster, looking from beneath his massive front and assuming a serious tone, "well I may be; for I have killed a dozen Roman consuls during the afternoon."

Upon the Sub-treasury debate Mr. Webster had the advantage of Mr. Calhoun in every thing except condensed logic. Mr. Calhoun rarely indulged in the luxury of a laugh. While Webster's wit was bitterless, he used it unsparingly. It was tart and pungent. But who could complain of his friendly, refined ridicule? Once, when describing the abrupt transfer of Calhoun into another party, he referred to a sentimental German play: "Two strangers meet at an inn. One cries out, 'A sudden thought strikes me—let us swear eternal friendship.'" Well versed in the English classics, as he looked at his opponent he must have understood the full philosophy of Drayton's poetry:

> "Let your jests fly at large, yet therewithal
> See they be salt, but yet not mix'd with gall,
> That they with tickling pleasure may provoke
> Laughter in him on whom the jest is broke."

It is said that Calhoun himself joined in the general laughter which tumbled on his head from gallery and Senate as Webster recited this mockery of sentimentality.

Mr. March, in his reminiscences of Congress, attributes much of the effect of Webster's oratory to his manner, and even to his dress. His dark hair, sombre brow, and dark and deep-set eye were aided by the blue coat, buff vest, and white neckerchief. He affected the Revolutionary colors.

There was now and then in his highest reaches of eloquence a good-natured irony, not nettling nor satirical, which made his acting alternate between genteel well-dressed comedy and tragedy, which the biographer is as much at a loss to appreciate and explain as for his sublime flights he seems unable to find finite expression. Webster, in his Hayne encounter, is pictured now as a Moses emerging from the clouds of Sinai, and again as a figure which only a Salvator Rosa should paint. His voice is the far-resounding sea; he is satanic; he is god-like. But it is no less true that Webster had the finer quality of wit and humor ingrained in his massive mind, and that the various elements were so combined in him as to make up our grandest orator and man.

There is a five minutes' speech made by Mr. Webster on the evening of the day of General Scott's nomination for the Presidency. It was a day charged to the brim with disappointment for him. He was heart-broken by what he felt to be the desertion of his fortunes by the South. It was a waif of the time, and has not been pre-

served in any Websteriana which I have ever seen. Is it out of place here? The Mississippi delegation returned from Baltimore to Washington, and called at his lodgings to serenade him. Mr. Webster came out to respond to their civility, and his speech, of all his very brief utterances, is one of the most remarkable and happy, as illustrating his temper. In its poetry, in the imperial majesty of its tone, and in its proud self-respect, it is Webster. No other man that ever lived could have made it. Here it is: "I thank you, fellow-citizens, for this friendly and respectful call. I have only to say, gentlemen, that the Convention did, I doubt not, what it thought best, and exercised its discretion in the important matter committed to it. The result has caused me no personal feeling whatever, nor any change of conduct or purpose. What I have been, I am, in principle and in character; and what I am, I hope to continue to be. Circumstances or opponents may triumph over my fortunes, but they will not triumph over my temper or my self-respect. Gentlemen, this is a serene and beautiful night. Ten thousand thousand of the lights of heaven illuminate the firmament. They rule the night. A few hours hence, their light will be extinguished.

> "'Ye stars that glitter in the skies,
> And gayly dance before my eyes,
> What are ye when the sun shall rise?'

Gentlemen, there is not one among you who will sleep better to-night than I shall. If I wake, I shall learn the hour from the constellations, and I shall rise, in the morning, God willing, with the lark; and though the lark is a better songster than I am, yet he will not leave the dew and the daisies, and spring up to greet the purpling

East, with a more blithe or jocund spirit than I shall possess. Gentlemen, I again repeat my thanks for this mark of your respect, and commend you to the enjoyment of a quiet and satisfactory repose. May God bless you all!"

Of Mr. Calhoun, little can be said of his public use of humor. He did not use it much as a means of debate. Only one instance do I recall, and that has rather the unpleasant bitterness of sarcasm. It was in reply to Mr. Clay, who had left his fame on various topics to posterity. Mr. Calhoun, in reference to the famous coalition known as that of the Puritan and blackleg, by which John Quincy Adams was elected President, said, "This the honorable Senator has not left to posterity. It is already decided!"

Mr. Clay, however, like the Kentuckian orators who have copied him, was blooded full with this essential attribute of oratory. He was at times as playful as a colt with his fancies, but he always had them under curb. In debating the Executive patronage in 1835, when such men as Wright, Buchanan, and Marcy were his compeers, and in vindicating the character of public offices as trusts and not as spoils, he dropped now and then into pleasant interpellations. His mirth constantly restored and preserved the good temper of the Senate. Mr. Buchanan was an especial target for his stingless fun. The ex-President was somewhat cross-eyed, and had little specific levity. Mr. Clay was referring to the Democratic leaders, at the same time looking at Silas Wright, between whom and himself sat Mr. Buchanan. Mr. Buchanan rose and said "he was sorry the Senator from Kentucky was so often disposed to pay his respects to him."

"But," said Mr. Clay, "I had no allusion to you when I spoke of the *leaders*, but to another Senator," pointing to Silas Wright.

MR. BUCHANAN. "The Senator looked at me when he spoke."

MR. CLAY. "No, Mr. President, I did not look at him." And then, holding up and crossing his two forefingers with the mischievous air of a Puck, and his eye all twinkling with fun, he said, "It was the way *he* looked at *me!*" The laugh went round heartily.

Once charging upon Mr. Calhoun for leaving some partisan alliance as to the Sub-treasury question, Mr. Clay humorously said that he (Calhoun) took up his musket, knapsack, and shot-pouch, and joined the other party; he went horse, foot, and dragoons, and he himself composed the whole corps! Again said Clay, "The Senator was once gayly mounted on his hobby [internal improvements]. We rode double, he before and I behind. But *he* quietly slipped off, leaving me to hold the bridle."

On another occasion Mr. Buchanan was defending himself against the charge of disloyalty during the war of 1812. To prove his loyalty, he stated that he entered a company of volunteers at the time of the battle of North Point, and marched to Baltimore. "True," he said, "he was not in any engagement, as the British had retreated before he got there."

MR. CLAY. "You marched to Baltimore, though?"

MR. BUCHANAN. "Yes, sir."

MR. CLAY. "Armed and equipped?"

MR. BUCHANAN. "Yes, armed and equipped."

MR. CLAY. "But the British had retreated when you arrived?"

MR. BUCHANAN. "Yes."

Mr. Clay. "Will you be good enough to inform us whether the British retreated in consequence of your valiantly marching to the relief of Baltimore, or whether you marched to the relief of Baltimore in consequence of the British having already retreated?"

VIII.

A NEW ERA OF HUMOR (1840)—CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL.

"So nimble and so full of subtile flame,
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest."
BEAUMONT.

THE old debates in the *Weekly Globe* show much careful talk about defaulters, surplus revenues, specie circulars, public lands, deposits, territories, pre-emptions, banks, embargoes, Indians, tariffs, treasury-notes, and other matters of a material nature; but they did not draw the regular flash of wit or the humorous rattle of the Parliamentary minute-men, like the era of fun which really begins with 1840. It is the year of "Tip and Ty," and the broad nonsense of that time. It opened with Corwin's reply to Crarey; and this refrain, quoted in the House by Tuplett, of Kentucky, echoed the popular noise:

"No Prices, or Swartwouts, or such deceivers,
Shall be appointed cash receivers;
And no man who is given to grabbin'
Shall ever enter this log cabin."

Every thing seemed to run to doggerel during that wild and wonderful exercise of lung and fun. Words were strained for rhyming and rollicking. "Full of pizen" rhymed with Frelinghuysen; as "bust his biler," four years before had rhymed with "Tip and Tyler."

An Indiana member held that Tyler was right in put-

ting only such honest men in office as gave support to his administration, if such could be found. This same member remarking that Webster was in Tyler's Cabinet, and Tyler had become a Democrat, said, "It was like grafting a crab-apple on an orange-tree." All allusions to the recruits and the auction which made the Tyler administration a subject of undeserved ridicule in 1842, were received with unexampled peals. The House then laughed at every thing. Governor Pickens, in appealing for the Constitution and the rights of South Carolina even, was received with roars. The "Constitutional fact," thrown out in debate by the Tyler champion, Caleb Cushing, provoked roars. The word "accident," or "Captain Tyler," was a further provocation to renew the roars. Even ex-President Johnson called a Tyler Democrat an amphibious politician, and there were roars. Another champion, Proffit, of Indiana, whose name itself in this connection provoked roars, cried out, "Butt your brains against the substantial fact that Tyler is President —your brains, if you have any." More roars! "What! keep me still? Keep Daniel Webster still? Bray away at him, like wolves at the moon!" Roaring roars! Perhaps the acme of this roaring session was reached when Governor Wise proposed an amendment to the pay of Senators, who had been champions of a peculiar shibboleth of 1840. His proviso was that no Senator should be allowed any rations other than "beef not roasted, and not to exceed a cost of two dollars." The shaft struck the vein. One member cries out, "Order! You are laughing hyenas!" Another member amends, so as to except the small "guard" of Tyler men, who are to receive missions. The laugh then was at Governor Wise, who moves further to except the Senate, where there is

no member of the "guard." Then, after the long-continued roars, the House proceeds to the business, when a wild bull is let loose by a hasty member. He moves a clause to the pending bill requiring a Senator to "certify that, when absent, his absence was by reason of himself or family, or by *leave of the House*." The point, or the horns of the bull, made the payment for absent days to depend on the ability of the Senator to show that he was absent by leave of the lower House. This was an alternative of jocosity, and his "accidency" and his brave and brilliant but small guard had momentary relief.

I may have done injustice to ex-President Buchanan. In looking over the records, there is much humor besides his happy reply to Clay, Archer, and others, referred to in the preceding chapter. His remarks on the fiscal corporation, in September, 1841, are blessed with a good report in the *Globe* (First Session, Twenty-eighth Congress, page 340). They begin with a play on the opposition, who had *done* so much. They had done one thing for which the country was grateful—they had *done for* themselves! He was clever in his description of speculation, anticipating in an amusing way the fight of the bulls and bears, and the emergencies of corners; and this at a time when, as he pleasantly showed, the exchange between New York and Detroit was only fifty per cent., "Red Dog" and "Wild Cat" being then considerably undersized compared with the golden calf worshiped at the East. "Political speculators may incur debts by borrowing, and then take the Bankrupt Act. The two plans will work admirably together."

Macaulay says that the knowledge of public morality is to be sparingly gleaned from Parliamentary debates. He thinks that it must be acquired from light literature.

The immoral English comedy-writers he holds to be more moral than Plato. The heroes of the orgies of Bow Street would not have held such discourse as Socrates and Phædrus, on that fine summer day, while the fountain warbled at their feet and the cicadas chirped overhead. So he would go to the ephemeral and easy-going literature for the genius of a period. However that may be with respect to the Grecian or English assemblies, compared with their light literature, I venture to say that the demoralization of whole states and peoples by revolutionary crises and moneyed panics can be best ascertained by the public debate. Even its froth indicates the general situation. When General Houston describes certain Texas obligations as selling at three cents a bale; or when Buchanan, Benton, and Silas Wright picture the kites of finance darkening the air with disaster, the very humors of the time are delineated. There is a funny point to a pencil. Better and older than Cruikshank, Leech, Darley, Crowquill, Stephens, or Nast, are that dressed wit and odd mannerism which come from limning and genius. Mr. Buchanan's playful wit shone in depicting, with artistic etching, how the great enterprises had failed in which Clay was a mover, and then drew him and his party in the pleasing posture of demanding a bank anyhow, even though its exchanges should be made in bacon hams, and its currency be small potatoes. It was the very ridicule of attitude, besides being illustrative of an era.

Our presidents, with but one or two exceptions, were sedate men. They were literally composed into a laudable calmness. The haunts of our federal gods were never perturbed by loud laughter, as Homer represents Olympus. Washington had the repose of Jove, without

his thundering laughter. The elder Adams was occasionally soothed by merriment of his own making, which his son, John Quincy, turned into an acerb quality, but which has broken out in the present John Quincy with royal heartiness. The elder Adams kept a diary. It shows an occasional mirthful effusion. His Indian story is sheer wit. A landlord asks a copper more for rum in the spring than the fall before. The Indian inquires the reason. "It costs me as much to keep a hogshead of rum over winter as a horse." INDIAN. "He won't eat so much hay. Maybe he drink as much water."

Jefferson had much piquant and French wit, in thought and expression. Had he not been conscious of his weak voice, which sunk, instead of rising, under the pressure of his sensibility, he would have been known not so much as a great writer, nor, perhaps, as the only American thinker whom Buckle has condescended to quote, but he would have been the compeer of Patrick Henry in another forum. Madison and Monroe were incarnate serenities. They were seldom stirred by the breezy incidents and accidents about them. Jackson—how he loved a good story! He told one, too, with a relish. Besides, he was not wanting in a love of sharp sayings, nor in terrific scorn, that almost rose out of sarcasm into vilification. Van Buren had a serene felicity of talk, which did not detract from official dignity. He had not, however, a large sense of humor. His son's copiousness of supply is enough for one name. Harrison had a merry *abandon* at times. Like all soldier-statesmen, he reveled in the odd incidents, by flood and field, of his early career; and his rural life at North Bend, among his neighbors, gave to his daily experiences genial mirth. Tyler, like Johnson, relished wit and humor after a method; and

Taylor, with his homely sense, to some extent. The serious cast of Mr. Polk's face was often relieved by an amiable smile. Mr. Pierce, like Mr. Fillmore, had the urbanity of Chesterfield, without Chesterfield's theory that it was ungenteel to laugh. They diffused pleasure about them without detracting from the stately influence of the magistracy. Several of these presidents—Tyler, Jackson, Quincy Adams, Van Buren, Pierce, Fillmore, Buchanan, Lincoln, and Johnson—served in the Federal Legislature; but they gave little or no special evidence of their humors in that sphere of public life. Even Mr. Lincoln's abounding fun fails to bubble in the Congressional pool.

Notwithstanding what has been said of Mr. Buchanan and his ponderous Conestoga team, he does not stand so far aloof from fun as is generally believed. He had a perpetual rose of hilarity and health on his cheek, and a twinkle of fun in his eye. The eye itself was an evidence, and the cause, of great good humor. But Lincoln is our only President who defied tradition and dignity, to tell his little stories, and by them to illustrate matters of great pith.

In this carnival, after 1840, we not only have the Tyler defection, but the sectional question began to irritate and scintillate into wit. Social problems, like that of slavery, made Cartter, Giddings, Hale, Root, Joseph R. Chandler, Lovejoy, Gerrit Smith, Collamer, *et alios*, humorous, as well as aggressive. When points of order were made, as they were, by Southern men, nurtured in the rules and devices of the House, they were as barricades against this defiant musketry. Owen Lovejoy is the genius of this kind of debate. He bursts out into a burly "Ha! ha!" that yet rings in my ear. "Oh yes, the spirit of order is invoked

from the vasty deep, when the harpoon strikes the blubber!" "Fire-eaters" joined in revelry. Pleasantry and pungency had as much to do with the antislavery crusade as polemics and platforms. This will be abundantly shown in subsequent chapters.

IX.

SOUTHERN HUMORS—LEGISLATIVE AND OTHERWISE.

"True wit is nature to advantage dress'd;
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."

POPE.

IN the South and South-west there was a company of men who, like Henry Clay, impressed their character on the country from the beginning of the Government. Starting in Georgia with James Jackson, Crawford, the Clarkes, Forsyth, Early, Troupe, Cobb, Upson, Campbell, Shorter, Colquitt, Lumpkin, Dooley, Clayton, Harris, Charlton, Talbot, Tatnall, Cuthbert, Gilmer, the Lamars, M'Intosh, Wayne, Telfair, Dawson, Berrien, Cumming, Wild, Toombs, Stephens, Holt, Hill, Campbell, and a host of other brilliant men, who were compeers of Macon, Loundes, Randolph, Barbour, M'Duffie, Clay, Lomax, Grundy, Preston, Otis, Tompkins, Doddridge, General Jackson, Van Buren, Adams, Webster, Benton, Allen, Wright, and others—these men gave tone and spirit to the first half of our centennial life. They led public sentiment by their mobile Anglo-Norman and pertinacious Scotch-Irish blood—by strength of will, purity of purpose, chivalric devotion to woman, love of adventure, attachment to politics, and their readiness in natural humor and eloquence. Impatient, impassioned, and impetuous, yet in and around all their experiences they reveled in a stupendous sense of humor. These heroes of debate and

their descendants, many of whom appeared in the Confederacy in arms (and are re-appearing above the surface of Southern society since the war), form a class of men unique and droll, cultured and gentle, peculiar and grand. They remind us of the Bruces and Wallaces of another history. Nor was their sense of humor, so happily reproduced in Longstreet's "Georgia Scenes," altogether restrained by the religious emotion, though this element was a large leaven through the bucolic and camp-meeting life of the South. Its pious impulses had been stirred by the fervid eloquence of Wesley and Whitefield, which Summerfield, Bascom, Maffit, and others had reproduced with increased zealotry. But in spite of this tendency to the seriousness of existence, their political and legislative life illustrates the humorous *abandon* of their nature. But why do not more of their facetiæ appear in Congress? Was it because we had then no short-hand writers? Did the militia-muster and the county court-house monopolize their humor? Has no one preserved it, and with its full flavor? Some traditions of it, at least, survive. Here is one instance. No more comical device appears in the narrative of the Irish duello than the attempt of Dooley, of Georgia, to incase his leg in a hollow gum-tree, so as to make him the equal of his wooden-legged antagonist. It is said of these men, in the graphic pages of Sparks's "Fifty Years," that they always played "high game," never "low jack."

Take as a specimen the Congressman and preacher, Colquitt. "Ah!" said an elderly sister, "talk of your great men! None of 'em's equal to Brother Colquitt. Why, in our county he tried a man for his life, sentenced him to be hung, preached a sermon, mustered all the men in the county, married two couple, and held a prayer-

meeting all in one day. Now, wa'n't that great?" Out of this stock came the rare men who made Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and the Southwest, with its Jacksons, Grundys, Polks, Poindexters, Houstons, and Bells. Out of the conflict of their ambitions came often as victors such Northern men as Robert J. Walker, of Pennsylvania; Sergeant S. Prentiss, of Maine, and others, who captured their hospitable constituents and overcame their hot competitors by sheer bravery of will and muscle, elegance of aim and manners, superb dashes of humor, and dazzling splendors of rhetoric.

These were the leonine men of the second era of our politics. How mercilessly they contended with each other for political if not sectional advantage! Dead lions now; but swarms of bees and honey were in their very carcasses. Nor should we fear the sting of their wit so much as to neglect the taste of their honey.

There was a class of members of the last generation, of which Howell Cobb, Toombs, Stanley, Hunter, Peyton, and Wise are samples. A little later still, say 1838, were such brilliant and able men as Prentiss, Fillmore, Polk, Bell, Evans, Lincoln, Cushing, Hoffman, Legaré, Vinton, Dawson, and Sargeant, of the House. From this group we select Prentiss, although his splendid rhetorical efforts give no adequate idea of his humor. There is a dash of it here and there in his stump-speeches. No man, South or North, ever left a reputation for purer eloquence. Pitted in his early day against Claiborne, of Mississippi, and against a candidate for Governor who alone of all the Democracy had the courage to meet him in public debate, he took captive the Southern mind. Not alone by his sublimated eloquence or ready wit did he capture it, but by his ready sympathy and honest brav-

ery. We have often heard Judge Sharkey speak of his victories at the bar, and the volumes which record Congressional successes speak of the great ovation which the demi-gods of Senate and House paid him on his debate upon the contest for his seat. All were enthralled by his witchery. He became national at a bound. His simple letters to his New England home, describing his trials and victories, give no idea of his romantic life. They vainly endeavor to tell of the success of his elocution and the temptations of his wild and glorious life. His paramount genius was oratory. His humor was the servant of this genius, not its lord. Once, when in joint discussion Governor M'Nutt deplored his habits, which were rendering his learning and eloquence useless, he retorted on the governor with riant effect. He first described in classic style the utilities and inspirations of wine and whisky. Before making the *ad hominem* upon the governor, he pictured the glug-glug-glug of the jug, as the politician tilts it and pours from its reluctant mouth the corn-juice so loved of his soul. There is no music dearer to his ear, unless it be the same glug-glug-glug as it disappears down his capacious throat. Then turning to his opponent, his face all shining with fun, he said: "Now, fellow-citizens, during this ardent campaign, which has been so fatiguing, I have only been drunk once. Over in Simpson County, I was compelled to sleep in the same bed with this distinguished nominee, this delight of his party, this wonderful exponent of the principles and practices of the unwashed Democracy, and in the morning I found myself drunk on corn whisky. I had lain too close to this soaked mass of Democracy, and I was drunk from absorption!"

Another galaxy of legislative brilliance, just preceding and during the war, was composed of men like Stephens,

of Georgia; Winter Davis, of Maryland; Campbell, of Ohio; Gilmer and Vance, of North Carolina; Nelson and Etheridge, of Tennessee; and Faulkner and Boteler, of Virginia.

Of all these whom I have named it is difficult to say who were the most eloquent; but for humor Governor Wise wielded the most trenchant blade, Etheridge had the most original flow, and Vance had the greatest abundance of anecdote and good nature. But none of them came up to the repute of that veteran who was called the "sarcastic, crazy Randolph," unless it be Henry A. Wise, with his copious invective and abundant illustration. Mr. Wise had a peculiarity in his speech of leaping from the severest denunciation to the broadest humor. In his famous fight against the Know-nothings he used this versatility with great effect. Once, in a philippic against the "Northern conscience," he exclaimed: "O gods! Northern conscience! Take a shark-skin and let it dry to shagreen; skin the rhinoceros; go then and get the silver-steel and grind it; and when you have ground it, take the hone and whet it till it would split a hair, and with it prick the shagreen or the rhinoceros-skin, and then go and try it on Northern conscience!" This looks artificial, but Mr. Wise was ever ready for the "occasion sudden," as his elaborate debates in Congress show.

RANDOLPH'S WIT.

Much has been said unjustly of Randolph. It is not in the line of these articles to vindicate, only to analyze. But no one in any parliamentary body ever figured so quaintly, so honestly, so intellectually, and so tenderly as this incarnation of legislative wit. He is properly

placed in an article like this at the climax of these rare Southern statesmen.

The following description of John Randolph's personal appearance we quote from Sparks's admirable "Memoirs:" "His person was as unique as his manner. He was tall and extremely slender. His habit was to wear an overcoat extending to the floor, with an upright standing collar, which concealed his entire person except his head, which seemed to be set by the ears upon the collar of his coat. In early morning it was his habit to ride on horseback. This ride was frequently extended to the hour of the meeting of Congress. When this was the case he always rode to the Capitol, surrendered his horse to his groom — the ever-faithful Juba, who always accompanied him in these rides—and, with his ornamental riding-whip in his hand, a small cloth or leathern cap perched upon the top of his head (which peeped out, wan and meagre, from between the openings of his coat collar), booted and gloved, he would walk to his seat in the House, then in session, lay down upon his desk his cap and whip, and then slowly remove his gloves. If the matter before the House interested him, and he desired to be heard, he would fix his large, round, lustrous black eyes upon the Speaker, and, in a voice shrill and piercing as the cry of a peacock, exclaim, 'Mr. Speaker!' then for a moment or two remain looking down upon his desk, as if to collect his thoughts; then lifting his eyes to the Speaker, he would commence. His style of speaking was peculiar; his wit was bitter and biting; his sarcasm more pungent and withering than had ever been heard on the floor of Congress; his figure was *outré;* his voice fine as the treble of a violin; his face wan, wrinkled, and without beard; his limbs long and unsightly, especially

his arms and fingers; the skin seemed to grow to the attenuated bone, and the large, ill-formed joints were extremely ugly. But those fingers, and especially the right forefinger, gave point and *vim* to his wit and invective."

There is a story often told of how he rid himself and the House of a pestering antagonist. While debating the Missouri question, a member from Ohio became impatient with Randolph's tirade. In the long pauses made by Randolph, the member would rise to move the previous question, in order to cut off debate. The Speaker ruled these interruptions out of order. At the third effort, Randolph, looking up from his notes, said: "Mr. Speaker, in the Netherlands a man of small capacity, with bits of wood and leather, will in a few moments construct a toy that, with the pressure of the finger and thumb, will cry 'Cuckoo! cuckoo!' With less of ingenuity, and with inferior materials, the people of Ohio have made a toy that will, without much pressure, cry, 'Previous question, Mr. Speaker! previous question, Mr. Speaker!'" at the same time pointing at his victim with his skeleton finger. The House was convulsed.

Whoever was struck by the Roanoke statesman seldom survived. One man, however, was almost his match—Tristam Burgess, of Rhode Island. In 1845, when a student at Brown University, I called on this genius of elocution, and talked with him of his public services and memories. He was old then, and lived in Massachusetts. He had had a feud with the little State, and moved over the Pawtucket to show it his contempt. His eye shone with a youthful lustre. His pet name was "Eagle Eye." His aquiline nose was emblematic of his character.

When Burgess went to Congress it was soon understood that he would encounter that spook of a member,

the piping, thin-legged Virginian. Mr. Burgess was an ex-professor of *belles-lettres* and had the graces of oratory at command. He went into the tourney with little genial humor, but an infernal sarcasm.

So keen and antithetic were Randolph's shafts, that they have the appearance of study. What the custom of Mr. Burgess was I do not know; but others as witty have been accused of memorizing their wit.

Tom Moore intimates that Sheridan's witticisms were all made *à loisir*, and kept by him till the effective occasion. This is incredible; for in his last moments he joked, and joked his best. He once said that a joke in Lord Lauderdale's mouth was no laughing matter. So even in his last illness it was no laughing matter to Randolph; but even then he joked with his servants about having his hair cut—calling it a surgical operation! He could not have memorized his parliamentary pungency any more than Burgess.

Mr. Burgess was not lacking in spontaneous fun; he made practical jokes with it, and once he got a Roland for his Oliver. He wrote on the lining of a brother lawyer's hat "*Vacuum caput.*" The brother asked the protection of the court, as Burgess's name was written in his hat for a larcenous purpose.

The observation of the writer is that the best humor is that which springs out of the surroundings. No jest depending merely on memory strikes kindly, strikes home, or strikes hard. Besides, studied invective implies malice aforethought, and no malicious man was ever great either in wit or humor. Malice corrodes the steel of the polished poniard. It unfits it for its work. Hence it will be found that men of spirit like Burgess, Randolph, Clay, and others, before they closed their ca-

reer, illustrated by many amenities either to friends or antagonists, to servants or family, that genuine goodness upon which true wit and humor alone depend.

In my talk with Mr. Burgess he spoke kindly of all his early competitors; and Randolph, when dying, was called on by his old antagonist, Clay. It was the grasped hand, the knightly honor, and the tender tear—these show the springs of sensibility, the secret of rhetorical power.

In his letters to his friend, Francis S. Key, Mr. Randolph showed that his heart was touched with gentlest and purest thoughts of another world. Toward the end of his legislative career, in a tariff debate with Louis M'Lane, of Delaware, he gave signs that it had genial culture. In spite of his own remark, that he would have gone to the distaff or the needle but for a spice of the devil in his nature, he was as gentle as a woman; and on this occasion he begged his opponent, Mr. M'Lane, in the kindest way, to point out his (Randolph's) fallacies, even by ridicule. "It is as fair a weapon," he said, "as any in the whole parliamentary armory." But he denounced the poisoned arrow and the scalping-knife, and in this debate he illustrated, by his reply, that he could, but would not, retort in kind. He rather praised the head and heart of M'Lane, who had praised Randolph's head at the expense of his heart. This delicacy of feeling was a part of the elemental life of the Roanoke wit. No one in the American Congress was fully his equal as a personal antagonist. He often made the infirmities of others a target. Nor does it detract from his wisdom as a statesman. The man who did so much for the Louisiana purchase, who foresaw our grand national future, who so detested and denounced the corruption which even then ex-

isted in land-grabs from Erie to Mobile, who was ever rocking on the vicissitudes of our wildest politics, had a heart illumined by the warmest friendships, and the most faithful constituents and servants. While his mind was instinct with the finest humor, it was alive to the largest humanity, as his will of manumission shows. His spirit has not altogether departed from the Congressional body. At least, we have two of his connections in the present Congress — Bland, of Missouri, and Tucker, of Virginia.

Randolph is a sample of that class of public men who, having no special vocation, gave to their country and their neighbors the benefit of a large roundabout sense.

PRACTICAL SENSE WITH HUMOR.

The present House of Commons, like our House of Congress since the war, likes good solid sense; but it takes it best when seasoned. Condiments with meats suit better than the Philippian order of elocution. We agree that men in all legislative bodies are listened to on their specialties—Laird on shipping, Lennox as an *arbiter elegantiarum* in art, and so on. No one challenges their ability or information in their peculiar spheres. But all qualities combine to equip a Sir Robert Peel for command, as all qualities combine to make a Randolph, a Webster, or a Clay. To make a good Speaker, like Banks, or an influential Senator, like Schurz, something more than business qualities is necessary.

We take issue at once with the assertion, so common in England, and becoming so general here, that the practical talent for business is that required for legislation. The mere business men in Congress are not the most successful as legislators. They seldom give their atten-

tion to general thoughts. Even a great lawyer or scientist, a manufacturer of paper or the editor of a journal—notably such men have seldom impressed themselves directly on debates and legislation.

It is complained that the greatest men in America are ostracized from public life, and that our second-rate men fill third-rate places. The complaint is untrue. Horace Mann on a school board was great; in Congress he was as much a babe in the woods as Horace Greeley off his tripod. Vanderbilt or Beecher would be lost in Congress. All *ex-parte* men, preachers especially, are unfitted for the forum of open debate. It is the full rounded development of all the faculties, including that of humor, which is the secret spring to political success and the test of our greatest men.

Had Horace Mann, Horace Greeley, and Henry J. Raymond used half the fun-power which they possessed, as General Schenck, General Nye, and John P. Hale did theirs, their legislative career would not be overshadowed by their renown in other spheres. Francis Jeffrey was a great reviewer, Macaulay a great historian, and Bulwer a splendid genius; but their parliamentary fame is as dust in the balance against their literary glories. It is not mere abstract knowledge of human society or of political economy that makes senatorial fame. Pistol hit the mark on Falstaff. The latter was chancellor of the exchequer. Said the fat knight, arguing for his budget,

"My honest lads, I will tell you what I am about."

"Two yards or more," shrieked Pistol.

"No quips now, Pistol. I am about thrift."

But he shook his sides with Pistol on the fun, and went to work on the budget—or the highway. This was statesmanship.

General Schenck, after two months' debate in 1870–71, when his tariff bill had been torn to shreds by close contests, item by item, turned his missiles of sarcasm upon all his contestants. He passed his own bill as a substitute, and received all the credit for the reform. How did he make the turn?

"My bill, Mr. Speaker, has been nibbled to death by pismires and kicked to death by grasshoppers."

Is not such humor a test of power? It pleases to rule, and it rules while it pleases, with no ordinary human wisdom. Whatever may be said of the accomplishments of our minister to England in other respects, he impressed me as the best leader of his party during my knowledge of public affairs. General Nye was not better-natured, and never so logical; Senator Edmunds was more keenly logical, Thaddeus Stevens was more domineering and sarcastic; but General Schenck had a natural wit, which controlled without study and design. From the outer rim of the House—Alaska called—to its innermost circle, he seemed at once to dictate without intrusion and to charm without offense. He did this by an ineradicable good temper. Was it not Bolingbroke who said that in comedy the best actor plays the part of the droll, while some scrub represents the hero! "So in this farce of life," he remarked, "wise men pass their time in mirth, while fools only are serious."

X.

LEGISLATIVE HUMORS COLLECTIVELY CONSIDERED.

"Thou art too wild, too rude, and bold of voice;
Parts that become thee happily enough;
.....but pray thee take pains
To allay with some drops of modesty
Thy skipping spirit."—SHAKSPEARE.

How are we to test the flavor of humor? No brackets in the *Globe*, as [*laughter*], will help the article if it be adulterated or poor. Perhaps this was Mr. Speaker Blaine's reason for forbidding in the last Congress the insertion of these odd notes of risibility and admiration! And yet there are remarks frequently appearing in the reports utterly senseless without the significant parenthesis, as there have been humorously reported remarks utterly dull without hearing them or seeing their utterer. This is especially so when irony is used. A genial and rich old gentleman from Massachusetts, now deceased, touched the uproarious chord on the salary question. He had deposited his back pay in a bank, fell grievously sick, and, while ill, sent for his clerk. "Here! put this amount to the credit of the United States." "Now," said he, "here comes the sequel: I began to get better [*roars of laughter*], and let the money lie—where it is now!" This is another form of the story of the sick and well devil. When he reached, in his remarks, the cost of living in Washington, he made the climax of fun by exclaiming,

"Let the farmers come here with their families and stay a fortnight, and, my word for it, they will feel it down here [*slapping his pockets, amidst great laughter*]." If the report had stopped before the brackets, and unless the manner of the speaker were known, the cause of this immoderate laughter would be unknown.

Laughter is not, however, always the sign of humor. Thackeray tells of a person who produced laughter by cultivating stammering, with no expenditure of genius. So in public debate the only way to account for certain laughs is to know the tone and manner of the debater. His mere language and thought fail to reproduce the sense of the humorous.

In deciding upon this deliberative fun we can not, therefore, rely altogether on the printed reports, nor be certain of its genuineness by the laugh which follows. It can only be tested by its intrinsic quality.

The humor of legislation is collective as well as individual. My division for this paper is that of collective humor.

It was shown in the last chapter generally that the body of the House laughs, as such. In that festive and boisterous congregation, silence has never yet, even on a funeral occasion, been entirely enamored of that mute music which poets like Shelley sing of quiet woods and still waters.

It is not the tongue of the talker always that makes fun for the body. The body may laugh *sua sponte* at the talker as well as with him. It makes its own fun in a gregarious way, as geese may be said to cackle in concert, or as one animal of the menagerie may be said to arouse a discordant concordance of harmonious dissonance! As in the human body, so in a legislative body,

it is not the *chordæ vocales*, nor the facial muscles, nor the head, which enjoys, but the whole frame, from the topmost exultant hair to the swelling diaphragm—heels, legs, eyes, all in one paroxysm of jubilation. It is not alone because the fun is contagious, but because all parts of the body are in a consentaneous roar. If on some days the whole House, with its Speaker and officers, messengers and pages, is ill-natured, and on other days as good-tempered as if on a holiday excursion, this is to be representative. We get this from our changeable climate, if not from our English cousins.

Member means a limb. In the old English it was restricted to the arms and legs. In legislatures, it has almost a Scriptural meaning—"Many members, but one body." If the eye can not say unto the hand, "I have no need of thee," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you;" how can an orator from Nevada, all eye and head, make his brilliant sentences unless even the outer rim of members, gallery and all, listen and laugh with delight? A legislature is a Dodonean caldron.

PARLIAMENTARY SATURNALIA.

It is a part of the rule of the English Parliament to yawn, scream, shuffle, cough, howl, and break a member down, if he is not liked, or if the House is impatient for a division. It is no fiction that Dr. Warren relates when he says that Tittlebat Titmouse broke down a ministry by an inopportune "cock-a-doodle-doo." Will it be believed, ye who stickle for the leaden gravities of debate, that there is a rule in the American Congress, to be found in Barclay's "Digest," allowing considerable license for the hilarious felicities of debate, and for that fancy which Hobbes thinks "pleases by extravagancy?"

On the 15th of September, 1837, Jefferson's "Manual" was adopted in so far as applicable, and in it (Barclay, 79) it is said that "no one is to disturb another in his speech by hissing, coughing, or spitting!" Ample authorities are quoted on this head. "Nevertheless," it is further said, "if a member finds that it is not the inclination of the House to hear him, and that by conversation or any other noise it endeavors to drown his voice, it is his most prudent way to submit to the pleasure of the House and sit down; for it scarcely ever happens that members are guilty of this piece of ill-manners without sufficient reason, or inattentive to a member who says any thing worth their hearing" (2 Hats., 77, 78). This is quite consoling to the vanity of the majority of our public debaters.

Is the practice under this rule obsolete in England? and how far do we practice it in Congress? To answer this we touch the key of much of our collective fun.

Dr. Kenealy appears in Parliament with his green bag and umbrella. He is the pariah of Parliament, representing simply an impostor and the old bigotry of "no bloody popery." Is that noble body disturbed by his presence under this rule? One would think so, to read the accounts. But generally, as in Congress, so in Parliament, members listen with great good temper to a maiden effort. The nervous are put at ease and the diffident encouraged. But impudence and bumptiousness are met, *à l'outrance*, with festive if not diabolical defiance. This defiance generally takes the form of fun. If the member bores the House, loud talk all around deadens his tone. The more animated and vehement he becomes (and we have this in Congress), the more furious the fun. "Divide!" "divide!" "'vide!" "'vide!" stun his ear and shut

his mouth. If that does not answer, the House proceeds to "count out." What we do to obviate long speeches, by our one-hour rule, previous question, and night sessions for "debate only," the English do by "counting out." Forty members make a quorum in the Parliament, though with us a majority makes a quorum. An orator who is unpopular or irrelevant is tripped up in Parliament by the failure to have a quorum. When the Speaker's attention is called to the thin House, he is bound to count the House. He orders the electric bells to be sounded, and the hour-glass is called in and turned over. In two minutes the doors are barred, and the forty members not being in the House, but being in the lobbies, smoking and laughing, the question goes over, the House is relieved, and the present chance is gone for the orator. This scene is invariably accompanied with good temper. It is irregular regularity.

We, too, have our calls of the House to discover or bring about the quorum, and the rule which has been quoted has considerable latitude on such occasions. During calls of the House, and when filibustering all night; when tired nature seeks relief and finds it not—the boyhood of the House bursts into a saturnalia. Before recalling some of these scenes, let me quote some examples of roistering disorder in Parliament. The liberties which the young and old statesmen of that body take with the unfortunate orator appall the delicate and decorous, and even the stoutest, will. Dr. Kenealy, or the case of Sir Charles W. Dilke, is not exceptional. Filibustering under the rules, which leads to so much disorderly levity in our Congress, is not peculiar to us. Sheridan moved to adjourn nineteen times to prevent a vote respecting the French war. He succeeded in his object,

as filibustering generally does. Perhaps the House of Commons is more tumultuous in its jollity because it never gets fairly under way in an important debate until after dinner, after ten o'clock at night. If our constituents, looking down upon the House of Representatives, become disenchanted with free institutions because of the apparent inattention to the orator, or to the business before the House, what must John Bull feel when for the first time he hears the noisy levity of his precious Parliament? Its tumult may be sometimes heard outside in the street, through closed doors, for half an hour at a time, vainly endeavoring to drown the voice of some six hundred and fifty-eighth part of that body. The scene is indescribable. The vociferous majority, which gives its applause to its leaders, creates a rapturous confusion utterly unknown to our American legislatures. These legislators of England seem to be trained like the Greeks of Crete, whom Homer pictured in his loud-lunged Achilles and his big-mouthed Stentor. The one was called on to roar the Trojans into Troy and disorder, and the other could be heard two miles off. It is not unfrequent to see hats go up in Parliament with huzzas. Applause is rare on the floor among our members, and it is becoming less so. Though there are instances of applause on our floor, still the general sentiment is against it; but in no case does it take the form of huzzas or vociferation. There is no way yet found to stop laughing. I have known members to call on the Speaker to do it. On one occasion when this was attempted, during a description of members of Congress retreating from Bull Run, Governor Wickliffe, a ruffle-shirted, large, jolly Kentuckian, made the fun worse by apologizing: "Indeed, Mr. Speaker, for my life's sake I couldn't help it."

Some time before Mr. Randolph was appointed minister to Russia he had delivered a speech in which he inveighed, in his peculiar way, against being at the tail of the *corps diplomatique* in Europe. "A cup of cold water would be better. What! should he give up his Congressional life, with its heartless amusements, vapid pleasures, and tarnished honors, to dance attendance abroad instead of at home?" When the news was brought into the House that he was appointed to Russia, there was a prompt and hearty roar, and then incredulity. Some censured it as a joke, believing it to be a falsehood; but the general jubilee was extensively expended on the famous parliamentary satirist. This was collective humor; and it was fully within the definition of Hobbes, that the passion of laughter is nothing else than a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others.

The spirit of exasperation, defiance, and intimidation which has ever been indulged in by the French Deputy, and which had its origin in the French Revolution, forbids the broad play of humor which abounds in the English Parliament and in the American legislatures. If it be true, as our old friend Blair, in his "Rhetoric," says, that humor is the peculiar province of the English nation, because of the unrestrained liberty which the Government and manners allow to every man, and that the indulgence of humor is incompatible with despotism, *a fortiori*, the greater unrestraint in our "land of liberty" and in our independent and social life ought to give us a freer and a bolder strain of the comic spirit. Cervantes once said, "My Don Quixote would have been more entertaining but for Inquisitorial and political intimidation."

Not a few of the scenes of spiteful disorder in Parlia-

ment occur upon mutual recriminations; but most of the scenes where Momus enters occur when that body is indisposed to hear a bore. An illustration of the first was the scene between Mr. Shaw and Mr. O'Connell, both Irish members. Shaw charged the great agitator with an attempt to subvert the Established Church, which he had sworn not to subvert. "Order!" "Order!" shout the Irish members in chorus. Then O'Connell accuses Shaw of falsehood; then the opposition cry "Order!" then the House is on its legs, and gestures as wildly as the French Assembly; then a lull; then other charges are made of atrocious calumny; then cries of "Chair!" "Chair!" and "Order!" then the poor Speaker uses gavel and voice in vain; then more "lies" given, more confusion; then that everlasting threat of the chair to name members or dissolve the committee; then an abatement, and Shaw gets in one blow on O'Connell: "The member charges me with spiritual ferocity; but my ferocity does not take for its symbol a death's head and crossbones!" Cheers and roars. Then O'Connell—never before so ready, though often more brilliant—"Yours is a calf's head and jawbones!" Deafening cheers and general thunder of fun.

This scene is not quoted to confirm, as it would seem to do, the English impression of O'Connell as a Parliamentary orator. That impression is grossly prejudiced and unjust. The bold, natural man, who is pictured with large faults and coarse sincerity, whose speech was "tinsel upon frieze," was ever subtle, musical, and skillful. Had he hated the Saxon and loved the Celt less, and had he been of another creed and isle, he would not have been stigmatized as the Athenian Cleon and the Irish railer. The wool-sack or the premiership would have

been his guerdon had his Titanic strength grown from English earth! But all confess that, whether in Parliament or in the County Clare, before the jury or the mob, he

> "Now stirr'd the uproar, now the murmur still'd,
> And sobs and laughter answered as he will'd."

Here is a scene of another kind, into which the bitterness of altercation did not enter. A member for Oxford hardly says his "Sir" to the Speaker before the uproar begins. Babel is as Spenser's Cave of Silence compared to it, and the supposititious account of the Park menagerie, when the rhinoceros upset the cages, is as a prayer-meeting. The sounds are not merely confused, but are blended in inextricable and pleasing variety. The bass of a hoarse member crying "Read" fills the interlude of bagpipes from the back benches; agonized coughs, lengthened yawns, sublime sneezes, such as the Olympians might indulge, are perceivable amidst the yelp of hounds and the hullabaloo of the chase, while, to add to the *ensemble*, all the cocks of the rosiest-fingered Auroras are in full crow, and all the "meek children of misery," the gentle asses, bray harsh discord! Up and down the chorus leaps, amidst groans and laughter; and this is the great deliberative body of history—the omnipotent Parliament whose fiat rules four hundred millions of souls on our star, from "farthest Ind" to extremest Zealand!

Nothing like this has ever been performed in our Congress. It is with us an utter impossibility. No future crisis, perhaps, will ever appear so full of legislative struggle for us as the legislative scenes before our civil war; and during that struggle there was much of this boisterous deviltry. On one or two occasions there was exhibited sectional hatred, amidst much confusion; but this

was not funny, as on the night when Keitt and Grow had their *fracas*. The insensate hilarity and ingenious devices for obstruction which out-Herod Herod, as exhibited in Parliament, find no counterpart here.

Another scene in Parliament which illustrates one of its undeliberative moods: A member arises: "I rise, sir"—he is saluted with ironical cheers and a zoölogical serenade—"to state"—a flock of South-Downs bleat him with their "Ba-as!" Loud laughter follows, till exhausted nature pauses—"I rise to perform, sir, a duty to my con—" Cries of "Sit down!" and all the sounds of the chromatic scale, led by the octave squeak of a pig under a gate, the shrill voice of chanticleer, the "Bow-wow-wow" of the English mastiff, and the mewing of Tabitha and her kittens. Does he sit down? He does. I can sympathize with him, having been under fire recently; and when I sat down, it was with the remark, "I take my seat, sir, boldly!" This sedentary alacrity always restores good humor.

One may well believe the anecdotes told of the first attempts of leading statesmen who were driven to temporary obscurity by the howls of Parliament. Their merit is measured by the magnitude of the difficulty when overcome. Pilots gain reputation in storms. It was only the other day that a Mr. Pell dashed in on an educational matter. He began: "No member can be more sensible than I am—" and there he forgot what he was going to say, and paused, while a titter ran through the House. "No member," he resumed, "can be more sensible than I am—" and again he stopped, amidst the cries of "Hear! hear!" "No member, Mr. Speaker, can be more sensible than I am"—a voice from below the gallery, "Who denies of it?"—"that the question of education," etc.

The Hon. Mr. Stanley, Earl Derby's brother, is a member of experience, but his manner of speaking is excruciating. He is nervous and embarrassed. He gets up to speak with a large sheet of paper in his hand, on which he has made his notes. He fumbles this over, and never finds what he looks for. "I think, sir," he says—"I think, that is, I would venture to say"—a long pause, in which the House sits in respectful silence—"now, this question is one which a colonel, or, I may say, a major, might, in point of fact—that is, I think, supposing his regiment were ordered to India—to India"—another long pause, in which some one says, in a stage-whisper, "On, Stanley, on!"

The same thing once happened in the old Hall of Congress, where a stranger in the gallery saluted M'Duffie, who was about to reply to an attack, "Lay on, Macduff!" Convulsive and resonant laughter greets all such efforts. It is the quick anticlimax of the whole body. Such instances are not rare in our Congress. "What would you have, sir? I am a plain man, Mr. Speaker, and am tired of these theories," etc., referring to free trade. "What I want, sir, is more common sense!" A fife-like voice across the way, "That's so," provokes the fun.

Humor is often unintentional; that is, it causes fun in the collective body without prepense on the part of the occupant of the floor. Once, in a debate as to the admission of the Cabinet, the writer undertook to picture them seated within the House after the British method, and by a fancy he supposed certain members were proposing questions after the same method to the organs of the Government. An Iowa member was supposed to ask of Mr. Welles, then Secretary of the Navy, "whether or not the Argonautic expedition of Admiral Jason would

have any effect, in case the golden fleece had been captured in Australia, either upon the gold or wool market." Then some one inquires, "What gentleman from Iowa?" With perfect frankness it was responded, "My pastoral friend." The honored member was a gentle shepherd, keeping immense numbers of sheep, and was also a Congregational minister. It was only *truth;* but the House welcomed it as if it were witty. It was upon a question which "opposed no man's profit nor pleasure, and to all was welcome;" and therefore it falls within the rule of humor. Here is another instance of unintentional wit on the part of the member, but to which intent was given by the body: The Marquis of Salisbury was discussing to the Lords the Church establishment. He made the parenthetical laughter by a bull. "A congregation," said he, "may be divided among themselves into two parties; yet if there were any means of separating them, they would both go on happily together—I mean apart!" The noble lords enjoyed the logical fun, and, perhaps, at the expense of the noble marquis.

"Who ever knew the gentleman to agree with any gentleman whom he differed from?" literally is a bull. It was once humorously applied by a Cincinnati member whose jocose Christian name is Job. Yet it admirably describes the character of a bigot. A Senator once said, "We are illustrating the impossibility of accurate discussion, *based on a state of facts* which are altogether unknown." But these bulls were only apparently unintentional. In the confusion of debate there is sometimes much unintentional unconcatenated facetiousness. For instance: Mr. Wood struggles for the floor. "He has had his hour," says Mr. Conger, of Michigan, and, by way of suavity, adds, "and he is an expert speaker and schol-

arly statesman." Mr. Wood, not hearing the compliment, said, "The gentleman makes a statement which I wish to correct." The House enjoys, though the individual did not intend, the pleasant surprise.

How quickly a laugh will settle a member and a question, even if the member be so considerable a member as Benton. He was in the Lower House during the Thirty-fourth Congress. There was a question in his mind whether the *sine-die* adjournment of the 4th of March should be at twelve midnight or twelve meridian. It had often been mooted in other years. It was once made by Quincy Adams, in a classic allusion to the graceful figure of the Muse of History in her car above the clock, looking down on members to remind them that she is recording the proceedings of Congress. When the clock pointed to twelve midnight, Benton, full of the old issue, arose. Pointing to the hands of the clock, he exclaimed, "I am no longer, sir, a member of this House, sir." The Speaker ordered the sergeant-at-arms to remove all those not members.

A CALL OF THE HOUSE.

It is in the call of the House that our Congress comes the nearest to copying the English extravaganza of deliberation. There is not much at stake in the simple call, except to get the quorum. But out of the personal excuses and general demoralization of a night session, when many members are "o'er a' the ills o' life victorious," there is a deal of fun evoked. It is properly classed under the collective humors of the body, rather than the individual humor of the member.

Why this occasion should be prolific of fun is owing to the fact that for a certain time the body is shut in, wait-

ing for the recusant absentees; and then when they appear, under arrest, there is a sort of jolly diabolism in putting them to the inquisitorial torture. These exceptional occasions generally occur after a weary time, or when a dull member or a tedious question is up, or when some party defeat or victory depends, or at the end of a session, when the House falls below the quorum because of the natural rest and relief which many members seek. This generally happens at night.

Is it a sign of our degeneracy that the night session is becoming more frequent?

In England the legislature has reversed the curfew. That body does not begin to awaken until *after* eight o'clock in the evening. It has realized Addison's satire on the customs of *his* time, when the daughters were busy at crimp and basset while the grandmothers were asleep, whereas it used to be, he says, that the latter were wont to sit up last in the family. Some one, speaking of this custom of nocturnal deliberation in Parliament, thinks that the Parliamentarians are the worse rulers for it, as their heads are muddled with wine. It is regarded as another line of separation from the people, who generally use night for sleep, and the spirit of dissipation and fashion conspire thus to render such members sorry guardians of liberty. They are called a parcel of drinking, gambling, nervous, gouty men, unfit to wage war with corruption at two o'clock in the morning. The Parliament House, it is confessed, has a dingy daylight, and the inspiration to speak by gas is too great to be lost. Disraeli last June threatened the Home-rulers with day sessions on the Irish bill, so as to hurry the debate to a conclusion. Is it a harsh judgment on Parliament to say that nocturnal sessions unfit it for business? But it is

Leigh Hunt's judgment, and to be taken *cum grano salis*. We pit against him Douglas Jerrold, who says that the owl, "the very wisest thing in feathers," is silent all the day. Like the scolding wife, she hoots only at night. Since the hours of owls and legislators in England are alike, we leave the reader to settle the question between Hunt and Jerrold—night and day.

It was in the convivial night sessions, in 1797, that Pitt and Dundas labored under the scandal of sometimes appearing drunk in the House of Commons. Out of it grew the famous epigram:

> PITT. "I can not see the Speaker, Hal; can you?"
> DUNDAS. "Not see the Speaker! d—n me, I see two!"

But it is a significant commentary on our time that the old Parliamentarians met at 8 A.M. In the time of the Stuarts the sessions ran till "candles were brought in." Late hours and luxury go together. The industrious are at their dreams, and the legislators are cheating the scale of labor to heap the scale of wealth. Such is the complaint in England. And are we not approaching the British fashion all too fast? By A.D. 1900 Congress will meet after dinner; and then look out for the menagerie! Already our occasional night sessions provoke the liveliest frolicsomeness. As I have said, they give rise to calls of the House, and to scenes which would "smile paralysis out of Nestor." The rules require that on such a call the absentees shall be noted and the doors shut. If no excuses are offered, the absentees are trundled out of bed or away from a dinner-party, and in custody of the sergeant-at-arms. They are then brought before the bar. It is then that the fun grows furious. No business but hearing excuses is in order. The members are coop-

ed in, and must find amusement. A New York member in the old Hall once climbed down the granite pillars, and got caught midway in a ludicrous style. Another once, in clambering down, caught his button in the net about the hair of a fair companion, and took the hair before the bar. When the absentees are called, the Speaker sternly asks, "You have been absent, sir, without leave: what excuse have you, sir?" Then listen to the fun. One member deprecatingly says, "The law allows me *per diem*, but not a *per noctem*:" his wit saves him. Another has been married recently: he is fined. Another has a sick wife, and could not come: excused. Another intimates that the House is tight: fined. Another was sleepy, and tired of the dull debating: fined. Another has been to the hospital to visit a constituent with the small-pox, intimates gently that the disease is contagious, and asks to go home: fined. Another, who was absent, happens in somehow without arrest. How did he get in? All sorts of surmises at his expense. A has been out to put on a clean shirt. B has gone to Baltimore to see his wife, whom he has not seen for a month: excused. C informs the House that he told his absent colleagues there would be nothing done of consequence, and proposes to be punished vicariously: it will not do. D has been to a dinner party, and E sat up with him: both fined. F was telegraphing about his oil well: voted a bore. G was at home on low diet. H asks to be excused on "general grounds:" no. H's friend has been at his room, reading the "History of Civilization," and commends the book to the needs of the House: fined. J had promised his wife, when he left Massachusetts, not to keep bad company or late hours. He might have quoted Falstaff: "Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of

me." He caught it. No man can vote till he pays his fine; therefore K proposes to stop proceedings till he "settles up." L has had a difficulty, and expected to go out of the District, etc.: he is mulcted extra, but finally excused, because it was so rare an occurrence for a New England member to have an affair of honor. M has had a fall upon the slippery steps: an ardent debate ensues. As he would not say whether it was before or after dinner, he received the penalty. N has more than an average constituency—a noble body; two of them called on him, and he went with them, to be fined for his courtesy.

Sometimes the deserters when brought in assume airs, and lecture those who have been up all night. Such only escape with a double fine. One member apologized to the country for being brought in on a Sunday morning! When the House adjourned, the question was taxing the whisky on hand. A point is made whether, pending that question, it is in order to *consume* the stock on hand. A common source of fun is to propose that members address the House on their hobbies. Mr. Fuller was once asked to speak on light-houses. He briefly rejoined that they were situated on land, to be used on the sea. Mr. Pruyn is urged to restate his views on the Presidential vote of Western Virginia. The largest man in the Thirty-eighth Congress was Baldwin, of Massachusetts. A small man—nameless—proposes, first, that he be divided to make a quorum, and, next, that he speak an hour on the prehistoric man. The hour is granted, but he yields the "*time*" to the small man. "Does he yield space too?" inquires Thaddeus Stevens. So many are reported sick that some one proposes a sanitary commission; another, the removal of the Capitol to a healthy spot; another proposes an appropriation for "chips" to

a noted faro-player. An Illinois member is asked for his excuse. "Guilty, my lord." It is proposed to reprimand him. He pleads in mitigation of damages. Another bought tickets, and agreed to take a lady to the theatre: not excused. One man wants to know what day it is on Friday morning. He is informed it *is* Thursday, though it was Friday; for the legislative day is not the day of the week. A similar question was once asked by Joseph R. Chandler, of Philadelphia. He was a Catholic. He wanted to know whether he should eat flesh or fish. Finally, there being some contumacy reported, a member proposes to bring in certain absentees, dead or alive. There is a call for a division, and a motion to strike out "alive." The House begins to weary. Thaddeus Stevens leaves; a motion is made for a burial service, as when the brains are out the body dies. "We have lost our head," said one, as Stevens departs.

It will be impossible for me to forget my first experience on a call of the House. It was in the merry month of May, 1858. It occurred on a private bill. I had not then learned the secrets of the prison-house. Being caught by the sergeant's officer on my way to my duty, I was graciously allowed the freedom of the mail wagon. How I chafed under my first arrest! What would lynx-eyed constituents, and especially my opponents, in Ohio think! I tremble as I recall these apprehensions. I was brought before the bar with Zollicoffer and James B. Clay. The then leviathan of the House, Humphrey Marshall, was in the chair. How he glowered on me with ponderous savagery! He made me feel that I had personally affronted him. I told him that I was sorry to *waist* his precious time, and would *lean* on his mercy; but there was no mercy in him. What a company there

was that night! Minister Washburne; General Quitman; Jones, of Tennessee; Governor Houston, of Alabama; General Sickles; Grow; Stevenson; Colfax; Bishop, of Connecticut; Bingham; Lamar; Groesbeck; Pendleton; Governor Smith, of Virginia; Giddings; Farnsworth; John Cochrane; and many others since then ministers, governors, and senators. Some of them are in the cold, cold ground. "Where be their gibes now?" Another "call" has summoned them to a more serious session. But it happened on that night, as frequently since, that the vigilant and leading men were absent, while the dilatory wags were on guard. How they delighted to catch Mr. J. Glancy Jones, chairman of the Ways and Means, at President Buchanan's dinner-table! What a riant row was made over his white tie and rubicund face and the Pennsylvania delegation, with the "J. B." brand on their brows, fresh from festivity! Few excuses were received, though many were tendered. A member from Niagara had "paired off" with his wife; another felt so bad because his wife had gone home, that he could not participate in deliberation; a member from Maryland was remarked as showing a disposition to be in the hall by being in the gallery; one member found the sergeant before the sergeant found him, and asked to have that officer fined; a Kentucky member had attended all day, expecting to die in his tracks for a favorite measure; but as the measure did not come up, he could not die; so he left for home!

When John Cochrane was called, we all knew he had been to the Presidential dinner; and his exculpation was not only a fine piece of oratorical humor, but he turned the tables on the House, as he did on the "fell sergeant" who had shocked him by the arrest. The man

physiological was astounded, the man psychological was appalled, his federal constitution trembled, and nature gave signs of woe that all was lost, for had he not been rudely grasped by the hand of authority? He had been called *high*, he felt low; and then some one suggested that the sergeant-at-arms held "Jack" and the game. Upon these occasions the native style of the member thus comes out. A dozen members explain that they had gone out for a bite, etc.; but General Cochrane disdained the ordinary Saxon tongue, and sailed into the empyrean of Epicurus.

The stately Mr. Groesbeck is brought in. He asks for counsel. Counsel is freely tendered. He makes a solemn plea in extenuation, whereupon Hughes, of Indiana, likens it to the sermon the old lady heard, the best she ever heard. She could not remember the text, or the points, or the sermon, but it had such a godly tone! General Curtis, of Iowa, comes in voluntarily; and he is fined for coming in without compulsion. Then arises the member from the wild-cat district of Pennsylvania, Mr. Gillis. He makes his excuse. Is it expected that he should know the rules of such a disorderly body? He confessed that he had been to dine with the President. All he knows of etiquette is to go and dine when asked, and he is willing to pay for it like a man. He had heard that he was to be arrested, and flew, not to the horns of the altar, but to the *horns* of "Old Buck." Harry Phillips, of Philadelphia, who had himself moved the call, had abandoned the House for the dinner. He was caught. He claimed to be the author of all their amusement, and threw himself on their gratitude.

One of the most laughably memorable scenes of a collective quality occurred during a discussion of the hour

rule. Quite a classical interest was excited. Mr. Vallandigham, quoting Colonel Benton, believed it to be a large limitation on the freedom of debate, a permanent injury to free institutions. He forgot that in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; and in many words there are divers vanities. A parliament must be talkative; but suppose, for a moment or so, it should have a session of taciturnity. The nation would hold its breath in amazement and satisfaction. He believed, doubtless, in the definition,

> "Man is a creature holding large discourse,
> Looking before and after."

He collected, in a note, the Grecian and Roman customs in regard to limitation of time. Then Etheridge, of Tennessee, arose. During his speech he said: "Now, sir, I remarked that the rules of the House require that when a member is called to order, he shall take his seat, and retain it until the member calling him to order has stated his question of order, and the Speaker has decided it." Mr. HARRIS, of Maryland: "I call the gentleman from Tennessee to order." [Mr. Etheridge immediately took his seat amidst shouts of laughter.] The CHAIRMAN: "The gentleman from Maryland will state his point of order." Mr. HARRIS, of Maryland: "My point of order is, that the gentleman has been indulging in a lecture to the House, rather than in debate upon the pending proposition; but, sir, as he has done it gracefully, and as he has evinced by his action recently a promptitude to practice upon his own teachings, I withdraw it." Then, resuming, Mr. Etheridge gave this reasoning for the faith he held as to the question: this rule compresses a man of brains into so small a compass as to dwarf all his en-

larged and liberal ideas; while it enables those of stupid natures and contracted opinions so to dilute their notions as to spin out and exhaust at least sixty minutes. He went further; and contended that in the States where codes were adopted, the lawyers were an abbreviated, revised, and simplified edition of a mean constable! His speech for free speech was more than usually applauded.

Once a member was excused when the Japanese were visiting Congress, on the ground that he was extending courtesies to them. "He has paired off," said Governor Vance, "with the gentleman from Jeddo." Mr. Morrill once made much humor by intimating that as the member said that we ought not to be in session, therefore it was wrong for him to be on hand, and moved to fine him for doing wrong by attending. "The gentleman's proper seat was *on the floor*, and not in the gallery," said one. A member desires the constitutionality of juleps discussed, along with a branch mint! Mr. Conkling once gave a scanty excuse; but, as he said, it was like that of the man who had a cold: it was the best he had. A partially good excuse, on a principle of equity, allowed the member to go free on half costs. A member moves, for the third time, to adjourn. "This rapidity of motion will disturb his intellect," said General Cochrane, who was the wildest of wags on such sportive nights.

And so on through the long night the imprisoned members indulge in what seems the very puerility of frivolity. But is it altogether to be reprehended? Compared to the English saturnalia which I have described, it is rational: as one may see a lot of grizzlies upon the side-hills of the Nevadas, where cattle are wont to congregate, doubling themselves up for sportive rolls, somer-

saulting in a most diverting way, until they make the herd familiar with their antics, when suddenly they pounce on the fattest of the beeves, and are happy.

UTILITIES OF PARLIAMENTARY HUMOR.

It may be queried whether there is any real wit or humor in these scenes. Men do not laugh without cause, at least gregariously. Man is the only animal that laughs (or weeps either), for he is the only animal, says Hazlitt, who is struck with the differences between what things are and what they ought to be. Hence there is a sort of ratiocination in laughing. It is generally the galled person who maintains that ridicule is improper for grave subjects; but who is to decide as to the real gravity? Shall there be no logic because it is abused, and no humor for the same reason? Second, is it fair to decide that such and such a scene is trivial or unimportant, worthy of playfulness or contempt, or of titillations of mirth or hearty derision, until you know as well the assembly as its manner at the time and on the occasion? Some of these calls of the House show a contradiction between the grand object, which is a quorum, and the ludicrous modes of obtaining it; and if they elevate the mind into effervescence, or raise mirth in order to relax and entertain, are they to be altogether condemned? It may be confessed that the relaxation and entertainment are not unlike the turning loose of the three hundred foxes of the giant of Gath; for on such occasion every one is a firebrand, and the crop of legislation is more or less likely to be injured.

Is it gravely asked "whether such scenes are fit for the first assembly of gentlemen in the world," and the freest body of representatives—assemblages which deal

with myriad rights and interests, the growth of centuries, with their conflicts of passions and interests, principles and prejudices? Are these Parliamentarians of England, many of them hereditary legislators, the tenth transmitters of a foolish face, to be commended for such extravagances? Ah, sir! there is something better here than this nocturnal mirth. Here is the elder spirit of liberty! Here are her majesty's opposition! "By Allah!" said an Oriental potentate, looking in on the Commons, "in my country we would have their heads off in a week!" This very freedom—nay, license—of debate compensates not only for the inanity of the Lord Tomnoddys and the Earl Fitzdoodles of the English senate, and the broad-shouldered bucolic Englishmen of the prize-ox and ruddy-face order, but it gives us the rollicking spirit which is never unpopular with English or American people. It is the great lever in moving masses of mankind. Is it said, again, that the wit of deliberative bodies like the Commons or the Congress is of inferior grade? So it seems often when reported. The jokes of the judge in court are simple, the facetiousness of the bar is foolish, and in all assemblages on business intent, the mind seeks relief from the lightest lisp of the silliest *bonmot.* A laugh is catching. We laugh often because others are laughing. Independence and impudence help it along, and the next morning's debates often fail to show the real causes of the risibility. A member once called his constituents "tinkers" by mistake for "thinkers." There was a laugh. The rotund face of Bernal Osborne may sometimes account for the fun he provokes, as did the burly, hearty form of O'Connell. The one was the "saucy boy" of the House, and the other could agitate your person or your politics at will. But they impart

liveliness to debate, and make logical wounds with their rapiers.

Sydney Smith held that wit was not quite so inexplicable a visitation as is generally supposed. He thought that a man could study it as he would mathematics. It is often studied and far-fetched, but I defy the whole Smith family to graduate any one in wit where the native element is lacking. Palmerston, who rose to the premiership by his *bonhomie*, won his honors by turning the unanswerable away by an absurd side-wind of allusion. If Disraeli, the dandy *débutant*, was at first coughed down as a failure, it was rather because he had overstudied his part. Now he commands most when not expecting or expected. He sucks an orange or pares his nails while impaling an opponent. Like Mrs. Siddons,

> "he is cool enough
> To pause from murder for a pinch of snuff."

True humor is not always that which awakens love, pity, and kindness. It may instill scorn for untruth, and disrobe pretension of its imposture, and, like the sportive Parliamentarians on a night session, unshadow the deliberative brow, and with "mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come."

In discussing the collective humor of the legislature, we have said that the body is moved often and only by the peculiar manner of the member, even when the member neither intends nor makes wit. A lisping, a stammering, a boisterous man, and especially a one-ideaed man, may bring down the House, without intending to do it, simply by his peculiar manner. This manner is never reported. A member is always reported in good English, irrespective of his *impedimenta* of speech. When a mem-

ber of Parliament gets up and "awsks the liberty to awnswer the oppobious," etc., he is as well reported as the member who says, "I rithe, thir, for the purpothe of athking the honorable," etc. When the ear is accustomed to this style, it may be pleasant; but how are we to judge of the fun by the report next day? We once had a Congressman from Ohio, now Chief-justice of the District of Columbia—David K. Cartter. President Pierce called him a Mirabeau. Judge Cartter stammered just enough to make his copious points gush at intervals like a flood. His speech, like that of Charles Lamb, was punctuated by the notes of admiration which his tongue involuntarily made. This also may make humor with the audience, though it be that of the orator also.

On one occasion, about two in the morning, when six minority Senators were vexing the majority by holding out against an obnoxious measure and urging an adjournment, two Senators, Sherman and Conkling, of the majority, grew indignant. Sherman declared that before he would submit to such dictation he would be torn to pieces by wild horses, and Conkling declared he would die on the floor first. As these astonishing remarks were being uttered, it came to Senator Stockton to take his turn in the time-consuming debate. He put the Senate in good humor and adjourned it by saying that if there was one time more than another in which he felt well—felt like speaking—it was at the early hour of 2 A.M.; that he was not willing to see the Ohioan die by horses; and if there were danger to the New Yorker, he pledged himself to throw his body in the breach and save so distinguished a man at the peril of all he held sacred in life! The Senate adjourned.

This may not strike us as the best humor, but it an-

swered the purpose, and the manner of it was inimitably comical. Like Boileau, the Jersey Senator dressed his speech in the classic model of burlesque, and made the insignificant seem ludicrously heroic. The Senate, as a body, caught the infection of the orator.

But the collective humor of the House has generally an objective point. As in the call of the House, it is directed primarily to the quorum, so incidentally it hits some personal frailty. It is the joy of triumph at the mischances of others less fortunate. It is the sudden conception of some ability to discover and punish. Sometimes the loudest laughter is at the signal discomfiture of the most exemplary and regular members.

Those who have been students at college, and have played their pranks and had their laughs at the sage professors, know that the kinder these teachers are, the more the mischief is played. The modest simplicity of the teacher is no coat of mail against the javelin of fun. Silent, quiet, useful, studious men, in the world or in Congress, are forever the favorite butts of the unthinking. Virtues are sure to receive their *un*reward in the ridicule of the unreflecting; and the helpless reformer may be thankful if the laughter at his expense is any thing more than tender banter, more out of regard than dislike. So that the remark that "calls of the House" have generally been a source of annoyance to the best men receives a larger application.

The loudest laughter may be that which is most gregarious, but the best humor is that which the mass of members do not produce. It is the individual quality which produces the best vintage of fun, and which I shall discuss in my next chapter.

Enough has been said to show that the American leg-

islature is not lacking in a healthy, logical, aggregate humor any more than the people it represents. It may not be as notably witty as that of the old Irish Parliament. There may not be in it the badinage and satire, philippic and abuse, of the English parliaments in the days of Pitt and Sheridan, Peel and O'Connell; but it is nevertheless true that our leviathan does disport himself in our Congress with wonderful glee.

If for this gleesome spirit we are reproached by the dullards and rasped by the envious, as one of the "fathers" of the House in their behalf, and quoting the imperial words of Theodosius, I answer them: If it be by folly that any one has spoken unjustly of us, we pity him; if by ill-will, we pardon him.

XI.

LEGISLATIVE HUMORS INDIVIDUALLY CONSIDERED.

"Fancy is ever popular; all like
The sheeted flame, which shines, but does not strike.
.....These fine merits above all:
Point without sting, and satire without gall;
A courteous irony, so free from scoff,
The grateful victim felt himself let off;
St. Stephen takes not from St. Giles his art,
But is a true good gentleman at heart."—BULWER.

IN Congress, as at the bar, to acquire eminence, something more is needed than mere current knowledge. Since the war, there are complicated and added Federal relations. To compass these implies that a member should know something about every thing. He should be a compend in science, and an epitome in history. He should be especially informed about matters of his committee. The parliamentary conflict can not be won by small-arms alone, but by infantry, cavalry, and artillery. The mere cross-roads stumper generally becomes a yearling Congressman, that is, a member with one term of service; for in his last session, being beaten the previous autumn, he is a mortuary monument. The survivors are the men who hold the House by making their minds an arsenal for every weapon. They are accomplished, or should be, in physics, metaphysics, ethics, history, philosophy, and, above all, in pertinent facts. To omit the lath of satire and humor in the close encounter, which is

lissom and sharp only as it is well tempered in all these streams, is to leave the prince out of the play.

This good temper has become indispensable since the enlargement of the hall of the House of Representatives, in 1857. It is the attractive element. It is so especially since the recent increase of the number of members. The most weighty, or, rather, the best, speech is listened to with fatigue unless there be an occasional smart *double-entendre*, tart retort, tickling piquancy, personal point, or pertinent fact. That which draws most, which empties the members' seats to fill the area in front of the Speaker's desk, is the bellicose. It is this which, like a dog-fight, will break up any deliberation. If it takes the form of a personal explanation, it is more welcome. This attraction consists in the capability of wrath joined to the felicities of fun.

The men who make our humor, in and out of Congress, are the favorites of the people. We give them pet names. Corwin, Douglas, Butler, Lincoln, all had these affectionate freedoms extended to them by their supporters or enemies, just as "Little Johnny," "Old Pam," "Dizzy," and others, in England, had them. They were associated with something jocular. Lord Russell's crisp scorn and Disraeli's epigrammatic sneer helped to mold English politics. Mr. Gladstone's serious mind, ever meditating between the moral and material interests, has not contributed to gladden the tone of English oratory. But in his despite there is much of the old flavor of humor remaining in the Commons. This decorous Gladstonian solemnity seems to be generally confined to the followers of Sir Robert Peel. It is well represented on the Tory side by the present Lord Derby. Hence we miss much of the brilliance of other and elder Parliamentary days.

These Adullamites would be more popular if, with their information and sense, they would unlimber from that painful and prudent restraint which marks their public efforts. The food they furnish may be nutritious, but it is not always agreeable. In vain we look among them for the wit and humor even of the corn-law times. Is English humor degenerating? In the five volumes of Hansard of the last session but one of Parliament, there is a "dull and sickening uniformity" of mere statement of fact, little deduction or reasoning, and much less vivacity. This is well, perhaps; but would it not be useful now and then to have a thunder-storm like that of Plimsoll, the sailor's friend, when he cleared the sky by a tragic performance and a cry of "Murder?" Better now and then the menagerie than the everlasting tame collision of selfish interests, unrelieved by any gleam of nature. The burden of debate consists of church livings and beer, Irish miseries and trade,

> "Improving rifles, lecturing at reviews,
> And levying taxes for reforms—in screws."

We may well ask: Are these the only elements of a national existence? Are these the only means of winning popular favor? Have the newspaper and caricaturist monopolized all the points of ridicule against wrong and all the jocularity which illustrates affairs?

Without being too much a praiser of the time past, and without derogating from the management of the English Parliament under its new conditions, we naturally recur to the "giants" of other not very recent days. It is no mere pun to say that its palmiest days were those when Palmerston charmed the British public. He did it because he was himself a fit receptacle of his own jokes.

Lord Granville had, and has yet, something of the easy, winning wit of social life. He has a velvety mode and a honeyed tongue. His flame is lambent. "Fair as the Lovelace of a lady's dream," he is not inaptly called ox-eyed, from his Juno-like majestic meekness. Have the days of roaring irony and sarcasm gone by with Palmerston? Palmerston had no peer for ruling, for he heartily relished it. How he could laugh at the "puerile vanity of consistency!" The nation laughed with him. He ruled as well by his laugh as by his judgment. Cobden is gone. Bright and Russell lag superfluous; Goschen ciphers only; and even Gladstone is half retired. Brougham, that incarnate encyclopedia, whose coach with its B on the panels reminded Sydney Smith that it had a B on the outside and a wasp in the inside—Brougham, he too belongs to the rear, with the Bolingbrokes, Pitts, Sheridans, Burkes, O'Connells, Cannings, and Peels—almost myths for their rare graces of wit and oratory. Disraeli himself, though a power, wields his weapon wearily; and Bernal Osborne hardly essays to play his old rôle as Mercutio.

Are public life and debate belittled in the public esteem in England or upon the Continent? The Parliamentary sessions at Rome are scarcely sessions, if we are to believe Mr. Trollope. How sombre is his Italy—in sackcloth and ashes, her head drooping on her breast, her hands hanging listlessly by her sides—sitting solitary and sleepy in the deserted hall upon Monte Citorio! The entire Chamber consists of five hundred and eight. The quorum is a majority, as in our system; yet for month and month business is impossible, and that, too, at the Grand Capitol. Is it because Italy pays no salary to her Deputies? Salary seems hardly to keep our Congress

full. Is the real reason the lack of piquant, eloquent debate, or has the omnipresent newspaper absorbed the other "estates?" There is no complaint of this kind in France. Even now, when Versailles is the Parliamentary capital, there is a freshness which allures to the Chamber, springing as well from the exceptional and transitory nature of the organism as from the inflammable vivacity of Gaulic and galling debate. The wit of the tribune is, however, too finical for general appreciation. When De Remusat dashes an epigram at an impotent ministry, Paris chuckles. "It has found," he said, "a new way out of a false position—by remaining in it." The retention of office after defeat is not a new subject for the pasquinade and the epigram, but no sprucer specimen has yet appeared than this of the departed statesman.

Nothing so arouses the French Chamber as a personal imputation. The Deputies are never used to it, always resent it, and are always at it. They give every thing a personal turn. Gambetta could have a duel a month for announcing merely abstractions. They do not distinguish between the official and the person. Nor, for the matter of that, do others. Mr. Garfield, Speaker *pro tempore*, once touched this idea daintily when some member intimated that the moral weight of the chair favored a motion. "The chair has no moral weight. Its office is to keep order." The most logical specimen of wit at the English Parliamentary noonday turned on this point. Fox reprehended Pitt for resting the sincerity of a ministerial declaration on the purity of his private character. "Such conduct," said Fox, "is by no means Parliamentary, nor could it in this instance have much weight. His private character has no reproach. As a minister he *has*

no character." A similar point was once made by Sheridan on Pitt; but Pitt, in reply, was scorching. He turned his electricity upon Sheridan by likening his tirades to the fizz and froth of an uncorked bottle. Then the caricaturist drew a cartoon, "Uncorking Old Sherry."

Looking at the stirring personal debates growing out of the Adams-Clay coalition and the Jackson administration in our country, we look in vain for something roseate and fragrant. Scarcely any plant appears on the surface, except that which, like the cactus, shows a hot sun and a prickly vegetation. Did these fierce personal invectives, which often led to the duel, have no relief in the atmosphere of social and legislative geniality? Was Benton always hectoring Clay? Was Randolph always studying how most bitterly to bite? Was M'Duffie ever alert to thunder and lighten? Men then talked about halters and honor, contempt and monsters, conspiracies and treason, in a way to astound our later day. This talk is not less surprising to us than would be the re-appearance of those departed Senators with the then fashionable blue coat and brass buttons, the invariable plug of tobacco and gold-headed cane, the immense flux from the salivary gland, and the incessant, magnificent profanity. There were fewer members then. They were better known, and made more mark than now. A philippic on the humblest was recognized, and had its run. There were two Barbours from Virginia, one a member of the Senate, and the other of the House — both able men. One, named James, was ornate and verbose; the other, Philip, was close and cogent as a debater. A wag once wrote on the wall of the House:

> "Two Barbers to shave our Congress long did try;
> One shaves with froth, the other he shaves dry!"

There is always in or about Congress a class of good fellows more witty in a social than in a debating way. The court always had a jester. Why not Congress? Charles I. had "Archie." His sayings were called "arch." Such men as Ogle, of Pennsylvania; M'Connell, of Alabama; and William H. Polk, of Tennessee, may be remembered in this socially jovial connection; but their printed or public humor, except in little spurts, is hardly to be found, even if it existed.

"If you believe in the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions, follow in the footsteps of Captain Andrew Jackson; then, sir, I hang my hammer on your anvil," said the eccentric M'Connell to President Polk. It was M'Connell who once suggested a homestead for every man, matron, and maid in the United States, who was the head of a family.

"The gentleman asks me who are my friends," said Etheridge, of Tennessee. "I answer, any body who speaks the English language, and don't spell constitution with a K."

These dashes of humor generally have a personal tang. Before describing more important humorists, let me set them within a frame of lesser brilliants of this character. General Butler once rallied General Banks on his fine theatric voice. "You say you read my speeches?" said Banks. "I *read* them," said Butler, "but your manner and voice were not in them, and hence they were ineffectual."

One Senator had a pompous habit. General Schurz being accused of that style, with mock modesty hinted that he did not want to encroach on the exclusive privilege of New York. Senator Carpenter was not less facetious, though less good-tempered, when on the French-

arms debate he punctured the alleged egotism of Senator Sumner to the quick. "He identifies himself so completely with the universe that he is not at all certain whether he is part of the universe, or the universe is part of him. He is a reviser of the decalogue. You will soon see the Sermon on the Mount revised, corrected, and greatly enlarged and improved by Charles Sumner."

Mr. Sumner's gravity often led to these little missiles, but they fell quite harmless, for they were feathered with the lightest of levity. "Ah," said Mr. Conkling to Mr. Sumner, "I fell into an error by supposing the Senator was paying me attention. His mind is roving at large in that immense domain which it occupies."

Judge John C. Wright, of Ohio, so many years the inspiration of the Cincinnati *Gazette* and of his party, was a member of Congress when pungent wit was apt to be called out to Bladensburg. Personality was then as common as courage. His pluck and his humor were once shown in this scene: While he was answering Mr. Randolph, General Hamilton, of South Carolina, who was one of the worshipers of Randolph, sprung to his feet, and, at the top of his voice, under great excitement, said: "The most infernal tongue that was ever placed in a man's head, and wholly irresponsible. Challenge him, and he will swear he can't see the length of his arm!" This idea grew out of the answer of Mr. Wright to the challenge of Romulus M. Saunders: "I have received your challenge, but can not accept it. Owing to the imperfection of my vision, I could not tell your honor from a sheep ten steps." The moment Mr. Wright took his seat a member rose, and, with a voice like a newly weaned mule colt, said, "The gentleman reminds me of an old hen I have at home that is always cackling and never

lays an egg." Then Judge Wright desired, coolly, to read a copy of a criminal indictment found against the member, and the personality was not so humorous.

These personalities are a piquant kind of humor which often becomes caustic wit. It touches the peculiar vocations, personal foibles, or physical peculiarities of members. This is not the highest order of festive legislation, but it is often used. Every one laughs at a hit about personal obliquities in body or mind. Even the bad little boy made domestic fun when he asked, "Aunty! did God make that man?" "Certainly, my dear," was the reply; "and why do you ask such a question?" "Because, aunty, he didn't make the hinges to his eyes on straight," said our little incipient mechanical engineer. Such occasions give rise for the readiest retort. Sheridan was once twitted by Pitt on his theatrical pursuits—"*Sui plausu gaudere theatri.*" He retorted on the youthful premier: "If ever I again engage in the composition he alludes to, I may be tempted to improve on one of Ben Jonson's best characters—the character of the Angry Boy in 'The Alchemist.'"

To call a large man "My feeble friend," or a little man "The gigantic gentleman;" to dilate upon a loud-voiced member, or cry "Louder" to his loudness; to mimic his intonations, or "take off" his hair or wig, make sport of its color, or emphasize the peculiarities of his dress or toilet, of his eyes, ears, or legs—these little diversions are as common to the legislature as to the stage. They make their momentary music, but scarcely rise into the risible utilities of the logical *ad absurdum*.

A palpable hit of this kind may sometimes be defended, as when a man wears his clothes to illustrate his own business, as a woolen manufacturer for a tariff, or, *vice*

versâ, a foreign suit to show the amenities of free trade. Then the toilet is subordinated to the topic. The man is measured by the worth of his clothes as well as by his oratory. Often references are made to the ambition of members. Senators, especially, who are Presidential aspirants receive these hits. They are fair, and are relished: they are the pungent penalties of prominence. Prominent members are generally the butt of the most ridicule. In the instances heretofore given, during calls of the House, these personal observations appear in *déshabille*. In the next chapter the personal points, not collective so much as individual, are gathered in one sheaf of spears. Nor are these freedoms peculiar to Congress. On the question of sending the Prince of Wales to India, and paying a large sum, it was piquantly put, that, as the object to be instructed about was the need of the empire, the responsible officials to be sent ought to be the ministers, and not the prince.

XII.

LEGISLATIVE HUMORS—HARDIN, CORWIN, KNOTT.

"His comic humor kept the world in awe,
And Laughter frightened Folly more than Law."
CHURCHILL.

THE jets of humor collected in the preceding chapter are from a class which gave a momentary sparkle to the sluggish waters of debate. But they do not fill our idea of the humor of a great forum. Have we, too, followed the hearse of our great orators and humorists? Who can fill the place of Ben Hardin or Tom Corwin? No one has approached either, unless it be another Kentuckian, J. Proctor Knott, the present member from Bardstown. In him Kentucky gives to us a second edition of Hardin, revised and improved. He is the fresh volume. It is elegant, scholarly, piquant, and bound in superior morocco, and clasped in undeniable gold. Our people are not yet through reading his Duluth speech. It hits the American sense of extravagance, which, as I undertook in previous papers to show, is the reservoir whence flows most of our fun. It is in his magic mirror that the identical and ironical Colonel Sellers and Senator Dillworthy are seen. His wit took down and off and out the most grandiose schemes and schemers, in the most superlative way.

These three members of Congress—Hardin, Corwin, and Knott—are selected to illustrate this extravagant

type of humor. Whence came this inspiration? All three were Kentuckians. It is said of Sheridan that he ripened a witty idea with a glass of port; and if it resulted happily, another glass was the reward. Like the Kentucky Congressman who took two cocktails before breakfast. When asked why, he said, "One makes me feel like another fellow, and then I must treat the other fellow!" Is the humor which Kentucky gave, and gives, owing to any peculiar juice or humor growing out of her soil? Is it drawn from the "still" air of delightful studies?

"OLD BEN HARDIN."

Governor Corwin once told me that Hardin was the most entertaining man he ever knew. He had an exhaustless fund of anecdote, and with it great natural parts and acquired culture. His celebrity for a quarter of a century as a Southern Whig member of Congress was not altogether owing to his gift of remembering or telling good stories, nor to his *bonhomie*. Now, while Hardin is not to be classed with these characters which I have described, a greater disadvantage attends a sketch of his career as a humorist. He is not reported according to his reputation. His quarter of a century of service fails to show the voluminous fun with which he enlivened and enforced his positions. Here and there we have a few shots from small-arms, as when he said, meekly, that "If like a sheep I am shorn, unlike a sheep, I will make a noise about it." When denouncing extravagant naval salaries, and referring to the naval lobby, he exclaimed, "Their march may be on the mountain wave, but their home is—in the gallery!" I have the "substance" of one of his speeches delivered in the hall of the House. It was in self-vindication about a local and now obsolete

matter. It is only eighty pages. He began by saying that he had pleaded more causes and defended more men than any lawyer in Kentucky, yet never was he under the painful necessity of defending himself before. This speech shows a remarkable array of facts, a keen appreciation of political ethics, a fervid patriotism, a touching pathos, but hardly one gleam of his reputed rare humor. Referring to the Kentucky families whose sons, with his own, were warring in Mexico, and speaking of the Governor, who was his antagonist, he said: "The next news from the theatre of war may put our families in mourning. But in the midst of this general distress, it is consoling to see with what philosophy the Governor bears it. He slowly walks from the palace to the Secretary's office, and then back to the palace, with stoical firmness that does honor to his resolution. Cato, when in Utica, never showed more. He knows that none of his family is in danger. They would have been soldiers 'if it had not been for those vile guns.' The only danger to his family is that they may be mashed up in the palace gate in a rush for offices; and when they get them, they can truly say that they are competent to the emoluments thereof." This was the only smile in this lengthened speech.

It is said that Hardin was a rough-and-ready debater, that his oratory was racy of the Kentucky stump and soil, and that he had more pugnacity than polish. He was known by the *sobriquet* of "Meat-axe Hardin." Randolph said of him that he was a butcher-knife sharpened on a brick-bat. This is not my impression from the meagre report of his speeches, nor from the articles now being published about him by Mr. Haycraft, of Elizabethtown, Kentucky. It is not the true impression.

Hardin was a man of disciplined mind. He was not

at all of the Crockett-Boone order. He had a native chivalry and independence which were representative of a border class at that day, but he was a man full of classic, historic, legal, and other resources. He had the varied armory which equips for general or special debate. Like a good lawyer, and with a wonderful memory and quick perception, he was the very man for the "occasion sudden." But he was rather of the humorous than of the witty kind. The butcher-knife is too coarse and the vendetta dirk too polished to describe his quality.

He was born in Pennsylvania, Westmoreland County, removed with his family to Kentucky when a boy, and was educated by an old Irish teacher, who was a good linguist. The teacher killed a man, and had to move to another county. Young Ben followed him, and changed the venue, to finish in the *dead* languages. He studied law with Felix Grundy, and began to practice in 1806. He never left his profession till he died, in 1852. He was on one side of every important case in those early days. His animation allowed no juror to slumber. He was not only successful because of generous reading, but, by rare tact, he could gain a case by "side-by" remark. Here is an instance, and it serves to show the secret of his legislative humor and success:

Henry Ditto had some sheep killed by a dog. Ditto shot the dog. A suit for damages was the consequence. Mr. Hardin appeared for Ditto. The trial occupied two days. The cause was argued with great ability on each side, and the jury retired. After being out an hour or two they came back into court for instructions on some law-point. After being instructed, and while ascending the stairway, one of them turned and said, "Judge, if the jury is hung, what will be the consequence?" Mr. Har-

din replied, "The consequence will be that twelve honest men are hung for one sheep-stealing dog."

It is related of Mr. Buchanan that in early life he went to Kentucky to settle. He saw Hardin in court, dressed in his unbleached linen, careless and clownish. But he heard him argue, and, turning from the court-house, he said, "If such looking men are so smart in Kentucky, it is no place for me."

Hardin was in the Twenty-fourth Congress. We had then unfriendly relations with France. A fierce debate springs up between Cambreling, John Quincy Adams, Evans, of Maine, Wise, and others, in which Hardin is a conspicuous figure. He plays his irony upon the indefatigable commercial member from New York, Mr. Cambreling. He compares him most amusingly with Daniel Webster; then, turning on Mr. Adams as the Sempronius, "whose voice was still for war," he reminds him that in the sequel Sempronius deserted to Cæsar, while Lucius (to whom he likened himself) remained faithful to Cato, and fought it out for peace like a man.

Mr. Hardin's allusions to the classics are not infrequent. He especially loved Homer, and, as will be seen hereafter, he became indissolubly linked with one of the Homeric heroes—the "snarling Thersites." Caleb Cushing forged the link in a graceful retort. Was this love of the classics one of the levers of this Kentuckian's power over men?

It is related of him that when one of his own side made a speech he took his hat and left the House. But when Rufus Choate began his first mellifluous speech this "meat-axe" man lingered and listened, and, listening, was lost in rapture. This demi-god of the Western hustings sits fascinated and enmeshed by the involutions,

all full of depth and all starred with learning, with which Choate delighted his ear and mind. Was there no refined susceptibility in this rough and hardy man? Choate brought the music out of his soul as the wind does out of the woods. He held Hardin as with the glittering eye of the ancient mariner. It was done by no other necromancy than the silver tongue and the golden thought, inwoven and intertwisted by a skill that would puzzle a Genoese filigree-worker.

Few men in Congress appreciated to his full worth Rufus Choate. Was it because he was too fond of the odd ends of learning, or that his rhetoric was too involved in fancies and frolics? Certain it is that while he entranced Hardin, he did not make the impression on the Senate or on Congress which we would expect. When M'Duffie, in his rude way, on the tariff question, charged Choate with weaving the texture of a cobweb, and picking up worm-eaten pamphlets to form an argument for the leader of a band of highway robbers, and held him up to ridicule as a humming-bird in a flower-garden or a butterfly in a farm-yard, how did this splendid orator respond? This man, "only not divine," who even yet holds in thrall the gentlest and brightest of New England's bravery of intellect, actually and elaborately "*denied the facts* and called for proof," as some Western lawyer once did in an answer in chancery. "The accusation is groundless. Let the Senator sustain it if he can." Imagine Butler, Hoar, or Dawes answering such a speech otherwise than by a countercharge of chivalric pungency! Yet the large-hearted and broad-humored Kentuckian threaded delightfully the labyrinthine beauty of Choate's rhetoric, and saw something in the legal dialectician and in the Gothic style of his multifarious oratory that enam-

ored him by a witchery beyond the reach of art. What is the mystery? It is the same charm of life and heart which in our first paper we remarked in Webster, Randolph, and Burgess, and in all those who have the susceptibility to humor. It is in the innate gentleness which, as in Hardin's case, shone in his life and triumphed in his death; for at the last, when dying at threescore-and-ten, Mr. Hardin called around him all of his kith and the brethren of his Methodist communion, and offered up from those lips, which had so often commanded in great debate, the gentlest orison which ever preceded the departing soul to its God.

THOMAS CORWIN, OF OHIO.

In all the elements, from the lowest burlesque to the finest wit, Thomas Corwin was confessedly the master. He drew from the arsenal all the weapons of parliamentary warfare; but how seldom he used them! His effusions were brilliant, fervid, eloquent, pathetic, but, above all, his satire, while keen, was not poisoned or barbed with ill-temper. It was pertinent and powerful, demolishing, yet stingless. The motto at the head of this chapter, which is the description of Shiel, describes the humor of Corwin. He was a great lawyer—as great as Ogden Hoffman, and far greater than he in Congress. His mind was full, and his words were thoughtful. He was no cynic. He was a scholar. His mind had ranged through the bounds of human knowledge. His eloquence on the stump and at the bar, in the House and Senate, when pleading against the Mexican war, or for compromise before our civil war, whether he struck the basso of sorrow or the tenor of merriment, was full of divinest sympathy. Yet he is best remembered for lighter efforts, as

when he started in full opulence of illustration after the foible of a fellow-member. No one, unless he has seen his facial expression and heard his variety of tone, can imagine his power. The play of his dark countenance was the prelude to his witty thought. What Bulwer has sung of Canning, who "schemed for the gaze and plotted for the cheer," may be more truly said of Corwin:

> "Read him not; 'tis unfair. Behold him rise,
> And hear him speak! The House all ears and eyes!"

It is said of Alvan Stewart, the eloquent abolitionist of New York, that he could read a dry affidavit so as to upset the gravity of bench and bar. It was in the manner. In this line Corwin was *primus inter pares;* or, rather, he was simply peerless. His face and its serio-jocoseness would have been the fortune of any player. "Will you have condiments in your coffee?" said a good landlady to him, as he was once traversing my old Ohio district, on the "weevil platform." Imagine that face, and the solemn courtesy of his response! "Pepper and mustard, madam, but no salt, thank you!"

"Cromwell," said Corwin, in 1861, "looked to the Lord—had great confidence in the great Ruler of the universe, but he had a certain confidence in charcoal and saltpetre, when it was kept dry." "I think," said he again, discussing compromises, ironically, "the best course was to hang John Brown; I think he said so himself. He thought he was worth more for hanging purposes than for any other!"

Whether this rare gift of humor came to him from his Magyar ancestry, or was induced by influences in his native county of Bourbon, Kentucky—whether it was a part of his early training or practice when a "wagon-boy," it

is certain that few men were ever so effective in its public use. As early as fourteen he had the action, emphasis, and gesture which make the rhetorical youth. His childhood was father to the orator. His independence of thought and his lucid expression we are not called upon in this paper to discuss. His humor makes one of the green spots in the Congressional desert. It would flood and fructify a sphere of drought and death.

One of its best illustrations is his answer to General Crarey, of Michigan, who had accused General Harrison of want of strategy at Tippecanoe. Crarey was a militia general. The droll manner of the response can not be printed. The humorous orator described a training-day —the leader of the host on horseback, the retreat to a neighboring grocery, the trenchant blade of the general remorselessly slaying water-melons, and the various feats upon the bloodless field—in such a style that his victim was ever after known as "the late General Crarey."

Never was speech couched in a droller vein. The time of its delivery is Saturday afternoon, when a saturnalia is given, as he demurely hinted in the proem, to servants of good masters. The way he touches the *non sequitur* of the debate is felicity itself. The pending bill is about the Cumberland road, but the debate is on General Harrison's war record. Before members can vote money for the road, they must know how the Indians at Tippecanoe were painted—whether red, black, or blue. The appropriation in 1840 is identical with the tactics of an Indian war in 1811.

Then he begins quietly to lift high his opponent in the controversy that he may drop him lower. General Crarey is called an illustration of the way in which we in America can turn our hands to any business. On a

question involving a subtle knowledge of strategy, what preparations had not General Crarey made for the criticism! But there is only one way to give this speech its real meaning, and that is by quoting:

"He has announced to the House that he is a militia general on the peace establishment. That he is a lawyer we know, tolerably well read in 'Tidd's Practice' and 'Espinasse's Nisi Prius.' These studies, so happily adapted to the subject of war, with an appointment to the militia in time of peace, furnish him at once with all the knowledge necessary to discourse to us, as from high authority, upon all the mysteries in the 'trade of death.'

"Again, Mr. Speaker, it must occur to every one that we, to whom these criticisms are addressed, being all colonels, at least, and most of us, like the gentleman himself, brigadiers, are, of all conceivable tribunals, the best qualified to decide any nice point connected with military science.

"I trust, as we are all brother officers, that the gentleman from Michigan, and the two hundred and forty colonels or generals of this honorable House, will receive what I have to say as coming from an old brother in arms, and addressed to them in a spirit of candor,

> "'Such as becomes comrades free,
> Reposing after victory.'

"Sir, we all know the military studies of the gentleman from Michigan before he was promoted. I take it to be beyond a reasonable doubt that he had perused with great care the title-page of 'Baron Steuben.' Nay, I go further. As the gentleman has incidentally assured us he is prone to look into musty and neglected volumes, I venture to assert, without vouching the fact from personal knowledge,

that he has prosecuted his researches so far as to be able to know that the rear rank stands right behind the front. This, I think, is fairly inferable from what I understand him to say of the two lines of encampment at Tippecanoe. Thus we see, Mr. Speaker, that the gentleman from Michigan, so far as study can give us knowledge of a subject, comes before us with claims to great profundity. But this is a subject which, of all others, requires the aid of actual experience to make us wise. Now, the gentleman, being a militia general, as he has told us, his brother officers, in that simple statement has revealed the glorious history of toils, privations, sacrifices, and bloody scenes through which we know from experience and observation a militia officer in time of peace is sure to pass. We all, in fancy, now see the gentleman from Michigan in that most dangerous and glorious event in the life of a militia general on the peace establishment—a parade-day—the day for which all the other days of his life seem to have been made.

"We can see the troops in motion; umbrellas, hoe and axe handles, and other like deadly implements of war, overshadowing all the field, when, lo! the leader of the host approaches.

"'Far off his coming shines.'

His plume, white, after the fashion of the great Bourbon, is of ample length, and reads its doleful history in the bereaved necks and bosoms of forty neighboring hen-roosts. Like the great Suwaroff, he seems somewhat careless in forms and points of dress. Hence his epaulets may be on his shoulders, back, or sides, but still gleaming, gloriously gleaming, in the sun. Mounted he is, too, let it not be forgotten. Need I describe to the colonels and gen-

erals of this honorable House the steed which heroes bestride on such occasions? No, I see the memory of other days is with you. You see before you the gentleman from Michigan mounted on his crop-eared, bushy-tailed mare, the singular obliquities of whose hinder limbs are described by that most expressive phrase, 'sickle hams'—her height fourteen hands, 'all told;' yes, sir, there you see his 'steed that laughs at the shaking of the spear,' that is, his 'war-horse whose neck is clothed with thunder.' Mr. Speaker, we have glowing descriptions in history of Alexander the Great and his war-horse Bucephalus at the head of the invincible Macedonian phalanx; but, sir, such are the improvements of modern times that every one must see that our militia general, with his crop-eared mare with bushy tail and sickle hams, would literally frighten off a battle-field a hundred Alexanders. But, sir, to the history of the parade-day. The general, thus mounted and equipped, is in the field, and ready for action. On the eve of some desperate enterprise, such as giving orders to shoulder arms, it may be, there occurs a crisis, one of the accidents of war which no sagacity could foresee or prevent—a cloud rises and passes over the sun! Here an occasion occurs for the display of that greatest of all traits in the character of a commander, that tact which enables him to seize upon and turn to good account events unlooked for as they arise. Now for the caution wherewith the Roman Fabius foiled the skill and courage of Hannibal. A retreat is ordered, and troops and general in a twinkling are found safely bivouacked in a neighboring grocery! But even here the general still has room for the exhibition of heroic deeds. Hot from the field, and chafed with the untoward events of the day, your general unsheathes his trenchant blade,

eighteen inches in length, as you will well remember, and with an energy and remorseless fury he slices the water-melons that lie in heaps around him, and shares them with his surviving friends!

"Others of the sinews of war are not wanting here. Whisky, Mr. Speaker, that great leveler of modern times, is here also, and the shells of the water-melons are filled to the brim. Here again, Mr. Speaker, is shown how the extremes of barbarism and civilization meet. As the Scandinavian heroes of old, after the fatigues of war, drank wine from the skulls of their slaughtered enemies in Odin's Hall, so now our militia general and his forces, from the skulls of melons thus vanquished, in copious draughts of whisky assuage the heroic fire of their souls after the bloody scenes of a parade-day.

"But, alas for this short-lived race of ours! all things will have an end, and so even is it with the glorious achievements of our general. Time is on the wing, and will not stay his flight; the sun, as if frightened at the mighty events of the day, rides down the sky; and at the close of the day, when 'the hamlet is still,' the curtain of night drops upon the scene;

> "'And the glory, like the phenix in its fires,
> Exhales its odors, blazes, and expires.'"

Our men of genuine humor should, like Corwin, more frequently level their lances at the extravagance and vanity which disfigure our national character! Then, indeed, would our humor have that humanity and refinement which Sydney Smith gave to it in definition and practice, whose office he likened to a Lorraine glass, which throws a sunny hue over the landscape. How it expands caution, relaxes dignity, tempers coldness, teaches

age and care and pain to smile, extorting reluctant gleams of pleasure from melancholy, and charming even the pangs of grief! How it penetrates through the coldness and awkwardness of society, gradually bringing men nearer together, and, like the combined force of wine and oil, giving every man a glad heart and a shining countenance! If more of this flavor of the mind enlivened our pilgrimage on earth, it would elevate benevolence and inspire principle. If more of the Hardin-Corwin type of men were in our public assemblies, there would be less of the treasons, stratagems, and spoils of politics.

PROCTOR KNOTT, BURLESQUE, AND DULUTH.

Proctor Knott is now best known as a Congressional humorist. But his humor, like all genuine virtues, has little or no malice in its composition.

When people first come to Washington they are disappointed—not now at the city itself, for it more than fills expectation, but at the public men. Sergeant S. Prentiss, the Maine-Mississippian orator, was there in February, 1833, and writes to his sister that he has seen General Jackson, "who is no more fit to be President than I am. You have no idea how destitute of talent are more than half of the members of Congress. Nine out of ten of your ordinary acquaintance are fully equal to them." This is the first impression. Closer acquaintance reveals that each of these unpromising members has some peculiar quality which lifts him aside from, if not above, his fellows at home. They are "singed cats," many of them, who, like Proctor Knott, may not be taken for much at sight, or for a month or a session or so, and then their native hue and quality burst out, unexpectedly and grandly, like certain tropical flowers, with a report!

Few suspected Mr. Knott of the possession of such an abundant flow of the facile and graceful faculty of fun-making. One speech about paving Pennsylvania Avenue had only provoked the House to hear more. They heard it in his Duluth speech.

When I first heard the English Parliamentarians speak, it was with surprise. No one except Bright and Walpole seemed to be fluent after the American method. Their hesitation and mannerism were atrocious. Imagine Cicero addressing the Roman Senate: "*Quousque—ah!—tandem—hem!—abutere—haw!—Catilina—patientia—ahem!—ah!—he!—haw!—nostrah-h-h?*" In Parliament the orator sits on a rough bench, his head covered, to pour forth this outlandish gibberish. Literally, he "puts off his hat to put his case." A case thus put is the very anticlimax of graceful and fervid oratory. It is the ideal of an awkward manner, even when delivering brilliant sense. Disraeli has it. It is the dandyism of dawdleism. It is the reverse of the *copia loquendi* of Cicero, and of the fluency of the incomparable Corwin and the unhesitating Knott. If a man in Congress hesitates, he is lost. Twenty interruptions give him pause. In Parliament it would seem that he is lost if he does not hesitate and hem and haw. But it was not the easy flow of Mr. Knott's periods that gave him prompt fame. He struck a prevailing sense of fun connected with our superlative language and exaggerated speculation.

The man who touches this theme in fit style, whether it be Mark Twain and his scheming lobby with "millions in it," or Proctor Knott with his Duluth, as the centre of the visible universe, where the sky comes down at precisely the same distance all around it, or as one vast corral into which all commerce goes, demonstrates the

typical American trait. We are a consequential people. We look for sequences. We claimed of England two hundred millions, "consequential damages." We did not get that sum. Sometimes we come out too often without regard to consequences. No matter what we consider, whether finance, war, or agriculture, the prevailing humorous tone is the magnitudinous.

Before, however, the analysis of Mr. Knott's humor, allow me to present that of another Kentuckian, to show the peculiar style. That State had a school of its own. One of her Senators, Mr. Thompson, was one of the most entertaining men I ever heard speak. Like Senator Morton, he spoke sitting. His speech against filibustering was in the best Kentucky style. He described the adventurers to Cuba as elegant young men, who, having nothing to live upon, do nothing, and have nothing to do any thing upon. They get to be overseer for a widow, marry her, and next year the rest of the family are disinherited. He likened the South to children spoiled by sweetmeats, and eternally whining because their stomach is not as big as their eyes, and they can not swallow every thing they see! "Whenever I see a man out in a muster-field, blustering about his willingness to shed the last drop of his blood, I would rather see some one willing to shed the first drop." Again: "When the Senator from Texas got on his legs, he was like one of our mustangs on a stampede. He made a speech which seemed to shake the North Star out of its socket." He had an opulence of anecdote, but he used it with brevity. He likened certain grabs to the highwayman in "Paul Clifford." When this hero took a watch, he admired it more for its weight than its workmanship. "Beauty when unadorned," was his remark, as he re-

ceived a gold chain from a lady. "The wants of others are more worthy of your attention than family prejudices." He could not for the life of him rob immorally. Likening a company to Terry's arbitration, "me, myself, and my brother will settle it; and they fobbed the grab." And yet again: "I was not a Jackson man," he once exclaimed; "but he was a hero and a horse! It made my heart swell to hear him tell Louis Philippe that he was no gentleman if he did not pay those two and a quarter millions!" This is the grandiose style most affected in certain localities. It is a part of our magnificent progress.

A French writer has recently expressed that there was no dubiety over the story he heard from a Congressman, about an Irishman who went to sleep on the prairie, near Chicago, with a stone for a pillow, and a buffalo-skin covering, and woke up to find himself in the dark cellar of a five-story warehouse, which had been built over him in the night, and in the centre of a thickly peopled quarter of the city!

We should not be too critical over such stories. As well quarrel with Mark Twain's *naïveté* over the handwriting of Columbus. Yet this exaggeration has its legislative expression. Senator Nye discusses the merits of torpedoes. How does he do it? He tells the Senate that Lieutenant Cushing blew the *Albemarle* so high that gravitation did not operate on it; and in describing the old blunderbuss and other ancient and effete arms, he said, that, in those olden times, if a man was killed, it was an accident!

But if you would have the superlative of this extravagant humor, gaze at the picture which Governor Wise once drew of Virginia agriculture: "The landlord skins the tenant, the tenant the land, until all are poor togeth-

er. The ledge-patches outshine the sun. Inattention has seared the bosom of Mother Earth. Instead of 'cattle on a thousand hills,' they chase the stump-tailed steer through the ledge-patches to procure a tough beefsteak!" He had met a Virginian on horseback, on a bag of hay for a saddle, without stirrups, and with the leading-line for a bridle, and he had said to him, "Whose house is that, sir?" "It is mine." They came to another house. "And that?" "Mine too, stranger." To a third house. "And whose house is that?" "Mine too; but don't suppose, stranger, I'm so darned poor as to own all the *land* about here!"

Already I have endeavored to analyze this indigenous taste for intensity of expression and magnificence of idea. It is not new with us. It is as old as the Revolution. Ethan Allen's "Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress" is in the same swelling vein. When the English commissioners came here to treat for peace, in 1778, it seems that the very meteorological phenomena and physical scenery stunned the curled darling of the court, Lord Carlisle, one of the commissioners. He humorously attributes the great English disasters to the comprehensive magnitude of the country. Excusing his failure to reconcile the colonies, he writes to his friend, the witty George Selwyn: "I inclose you our manifesto, which you will never read. 'Tis a sort of dying speech of the commission, an effort from which I expect little success..... Every thing is upon a great scale upon this continent. The rivers are immense, the climate violent in heat and cold, the prospects magnificent, the thunder and lightning tremendous. The disorders incident to the country make every constitution tremble. Our own blunders here, our misconduct, our losses, our disgraces, our ruin, are on a

great scale." He caught the salient feature of our scenery and society. We have only aggrandized it since.

A burst of exaggeration in an American assembly as surely awakens ludicrous interest as an allusion to a horse-race in the English Parliament. *Punch*, in its "Essence of Parliament," can well say of Mr. Hubbard, M.P., "On any hobby, he is a heavy goer." The model average English statesman is well described as

> "The lounging member seldom in his place,
> And then with thoughts remote upon a race."

Hence, an allusion to a ministry as splintered, spavined, and broken-winded is always received with laughter by a body which adjourns for the Derby, and which represents a people who on that day take the liberty to abuse all on the road—nob and snob, tramp and shop-man, queen and courtesan. We used to have Congressmen fond of the turf—Southern men. Their allusions smacked of the English. Once, in comparing Clay with Polk, an eloquent Tennesseean remarked, that "You have brought out, for a four-mile heat, a spavined, ring-boned, string-halt, broken-winded, bobtailed pony to run against 'Eclipse!'" But in an American Congress nothing so suits the prevailing temper and tone as the grotesque and ample hyperbole, the accumulated largeness of language bestowed on the description of a grand speculation, with its gorgeous incidents and its magnificent accidents.

When this Kentuckian, Knott, first talked in Congress, he struck this Big Bonanza vein. How the House enjoyed it! I remember well his first pathetic description of the depth of that love for the people entertained by members; how it surpassed that of the young mother for her first-born—a depth of sentiment which bankrupts all

the resources of pathetic eloquence and stirring poetry. How affluently he smoothed the raven-down of darkness till it smiled as he pictured the negroes who hung about the Capitol and in the galleries, perched like turkey-buzzards in a deadening, waiting for the rich repast that Congress was expected to prepare for their rapacious beaks! Then how neatly he changed the scene to Judiciary Square, full of the same class, reclining in the shade, like black snakes in a brier-patch! In this strain of exaggeration he took up the Pennsylvania Avenue Pavement Bill. Did he argue the points logically? Of course. But who remembers the logic of arithmetic when down the deep iambic lines the cothurn treads majestic, full of mock and tumid tropes? Who cares for the syllogism or the *ignoratio elenchi* when a chorus of Bacchantes sing the dithyramb of wild and intoxicating frolicsomeness? There is a logic of fun which drowns, overtops all; and Proctor Knott floated on this rolling sea as easily as Captain Boynton in the Channel, or, rather, like a behemoth of the deep.

After making a picture of the luxury of the capital, its fragrant squares, its polished walks, its promenades and drives, its sinuous foot-paths, laid with an elastic concrete of white sea-sand, bordered with shrubbery that would have lent new charms to Calypso's favorite bower, and winding away in all the intricate mazes of the Cretan labyrinth—its satin-slippered beauties, reclining in such ecstatic languor upon the downy cushions of their splendid carriages that even the perfumed zephyr, as he steals from beds of rare exotics, shall not kiss their velvet cheeks too rudely, nor the dancing sunbeams taste the delicious fragrance that exhales from their honeyed lips—the orator, like the gladiator of Byron, sees his young barbarians of

Kentucky at play on the blue grass; and he turns lovingly to the toil-browned, barefooted daughter of a taxed Kentucky constituent, in her homespun gown, innocent of crinoline or train. Is this ample enough? Like his predecessor, he, too, is fond of Homer; and the touching picture he draws of the sacrifices of the office-holder is in the best vein of Ben Hardin. There was no being on earth for whose comfort he entertained so profound a solicitude as for that of your public functionary, no one whose smallest want so stirred his sympathetic soul to its serenest depths:

"When I see him bidding adieu to the sweets of private life, for which he is so eminently fitted by nature, to immolate himself on the altar of his country, Homer's touching picture of the last scene between the noble Hector and his weeping family rises before my imagination; when I see him seated sorrowfully at a miserable repast of sea-terrapin and Champagne, my very bowels yearn for him; and when I see him performing, perhaps, the only duty for which he is fully competent, signing the receipt for his monthly pay, I am so overwhelmed for his miserable condition that I wish I were in his place."

In a similar strain of elaborate satire, he desired new pavements over which the carriages of our Government officials, with their coats of arms and liveried outriders, might glide as smoothly and noiselessly as the aërial car of the fairy queen through the rose-tinted clouds of the upper ether. Winding up his speech with pregnant statistics and prophetic sense, he saw what many did not see then (1870), what local and Federal extravagance was bringing upon the capital.

In the peroration of this his first speech, which brought the Kentucky orator to the front, he was puzzled to tell

what power short of an omniscient providence could foretell what the Government would eventually have to pay for the improvement of this avenue. The astronomer predicts a total eclipse of the sun a hundred years in the future, and names the exact time and place upon the earth at which the sublime phenomenon will first be seen; and, whether it be upon the costly icebergs of Alaska or the blood-stained soil of suffering Cuba, punctual to the second the gigantic shadow falls upon the precise spot he indicates. Thus summoning the infinitudes and splendors of the starry hosts by a sublime anticlimax, all radiant with humor, he can not foretell what any public improvement about Washington City will cost, or when it will be finished. It defies the highest mathematics and the utmost range of conjecture.

Until the Duluth speech was made, the House had little thought of the rich plenitude of humor in store for them. The surprise was enhanced because Mr. Knott spoke rarely. He was not an active, rather a lazy, member—ostensibly so.

"He used to slug or sleep, in slothful shade."

They took the alligator for a log, till they sat on him. Grudgingly was the floor yielded to him on the Duluth debate. He was offered only ten minutes; whereupon he remarked that his facilities for getting time were so poor that, if he were standing on the brink of perdition, and the sands were crumbling under his feet, he could not in that body get time enough to say the Lord's Prayer. The St. Croix and Bayfield Road Bill asked for some of the public domain. Mr. Knott disavowed any more interest in the bill than in an orange-grove on the bleakest summit of Greenland's icy mount-

ains. It was thus that he introduced the splendid project: "Years ago, when I first heard that there was somewhere in the vast *terra incognita*, somewhere in the bleak regions of the great North-west, a stream of water known to the nomadic inhabitants of the neighborhood as the river St. Croix, I became satisfied that the construction of a railroad from that raging torrent to some point in the civilized world was essential to the happiness and prosperity of the American people, if not absolutely indispensable to the perpetuity of republican institutions on this continent. [Great laughter.] I felt instinctively that the boundless resources of that prolific region of sand and pine-shrubbery would never be fully developed without a railroad constructed and equipped at the expense of the Government, and perhaps not then. [Laughter.] I had an abiding presentiment that, some day or other, the people of this whole country, irrespective of party affiliations, regardless of sectional prejudices, and 'without distinction of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,' would rise in their majesty and demand an outlet for the enormous agricultural productions of those vast and fertile pine-barrens, drained in the rainy season by the surging waters of the turbid St. Croix." [Great laughter.]

He put this problem to the House as to the value of the lands: If the timbered lands are the most valuable, and valueless without the timber, what is the remainder of the land worth, which has no timber on it at all? How he pictured this land satirically as the Goshen of America and an inexhaustible mine of agricultural wealth, and then with truthful exaggeration as a region which in ten years would by its vegetation fatten a grasshopper! how he brooded over the dangers to our Government if it neg-

lected or abandoned such a region! how he amplified these dangers from the Declaration of Independence, secession, reconstruction, and the new amendments, and, after all, the worst of all dangers—the peril of our navy rotting in their docks for want of railroad communication with the prolific pine-thickets of the St. Croix! Then he was concerned because we had lost Alta Vela, a guano isle; and then as to the proper point of connection with the teeming pine-barrens, until, amidst shouts of laughter, he mentioned "Duluth!" It has since been known as the Zenith City of the Unsalted Seas! Duluth! How he rolls it as a sweet morsel under and over his tongue!

"Duluth! The word fell upon my ear with peculiar and indescribable charm, like the gentle murmur of a low fountain stealing forth in the midst of roses, or the soft, sweet accents of an angel's whisper in the bright, joyous dream of sleeping innocence. Duluth! 'Twas the name for which my soul had panted for years, as the hart panteth for the water-brooks. [Renewed laughter.] But where was Duluth? Never in all my limited reading had my vision been gladdened by seeing the celestial word in print. [Laughter.] And I felt a profounder humiliation in my ignorance that its dulcet syllables had never before ravished my delighted ear. [Roars of laughter.] I was certain the draughtsman of this bill had never heard of it, or it would have been designated as one of the termini of this road. I asked my friends about it, but they knew nothing of it. I rushed to the library and examined all the maps I could find. [Laughter.] I discovered in one of them a delicate, hair-like line, diverging from the Mississippi near a place marked Prescott, which I supposed was intended to represent the river St. Croix, but I could nowhere find Duluth.

"Nevertheless, I was confident it existed somewhere, and that its discovery would constitute the crowning glory of the present century, if not of all modern times. [Laughter.] I knew it was bound to exist, in the very nature of things; that the symmetry and perfection of our planetary system would be incomplete without it [renewed laughter]; that the elements of material nature would long since have resolved themselves back into original chaos if there had been such a hiatus in creation as would have resulted from leaving out Duluth. [Roars of laughter.] In fact, sir, I was overwhelmed with the conviction that Duluth not only existed somewhere, but that, wherever it was, it was a great and glorious place. I was convinced that the greatest calamity that ever befell the benighted nations of the ancient world was in their having passed away without a knowledge of the actual existence of Duluth; that their fabled Atlantis, never seen save by the hallowed vision of inspired poesy, was, in fact, but another name for Duluth; that the golden orchard of the Hesperides was but a poetical synonym for the beer-gardens in the vicinity of Duluth. [Great laughter.] I was certain that Herodotus had died a miserable death because in all his travels and with all his geographical research he had never heard of Duluth. [Laughter.] I knew that if the immortal spirit of Homer could look down from another heaven than that created by his own celestial genius upon the long lines of pilgrims from every nation of the earth to the gushing fountain of poesy opened by the touch of his magic wand; if he could be permitted to behold the vast assemblage of grand and glorious productions of the lyric art called into being by his own inspired strains, he would weep tears of bitter anguish that, instead of lavishing all the

stores of his mighty genius upon the fall of Ilion, it had not been his more blessed lot to crystallize in deathless song the rising glories of Duluth. [Great and continued laughter.] Yet, sir, had it not been for this map, kindly furnished me by the Legislature of Minnesota, I might have gone down to my obscure and humble grave in an agony of despair because I could nowhere find Duluth. [Renewed laughter.] Had such been my melancholy fate, I have no doubt that with the last feeble pulsation of my breaking heart, with the last faint exhalation of my fleeting breath, I should have whispered, 'Where is Duluth?' [Roars of laughter.]

"But, thanks to the beneficence of that band of ministering angels who have their bright abodes in the far-off capital of Minnesota, just as the agony of my anxiety was about to culminate in the frenzy of despair, this blessed map was placed in my hands; and as I unfolded it a resplendent scene of ineffable glory opened before me, such as I imagine burst upon the enraptured vision of the wandering peri through the opening gates of paradise. [Renewed laughter.] There, there for the first time, my enchanted eye rested upon the ravishing word 'Duluth.'

"If gentlemen will examine it, they will find Duluth not only in the centre of the map, but represented in the centre of a series of concentric circles one hundred miles apart, and some of them as much as four thousand miles in diameter, embracing alike in their tremendous sweep the fragrant savannas of the sunlit South and the eternal solitudes of snow that mantle the ice-bound North. [Laughter.] How these circles were produced is perhaps one of those primordial mysteries that the most skillful paleologist will never be able to explain. [Renewed laughter.] But the fact is, sir, Duluth is pre-emi-

nently a central place, for I am told by gentlemen who have been so reckless of their own personal safety as to venture away into those awful regions where Duluth is supposed to be, that it is so exactly in the centre of the visible universe that the sky comes down at precisely the same distance all around it." [Roars of laughter.]

After thus locating his paradise, he ascertains its neighborhood advantages — buffaloes, Piegans, and other savages. He describes the convenience by which the red men could drive the buffalo into Duluth. "I think I see them now," exclaimed the inspired humorist — "a vast herd, with heads down, eyes glaring, nostrils dilated, tongues out, and tails curled over their backs, tearing along toward Duluth, with a thousand Piegans on their grass-bellied ponies yelling at their heels! On they come! And as they sweep past the Creeks, they too join in the chase, and away they all go, yelling, bellowing, ripping and tearing along, amidst clouds of dust, until the last buffalo is safely penned in the stock-yards of Duluth!"

Was this burlesque relished by honest and fun loving people? Yes; thousands have sent and are yet sending for the document. Why? Simply because the orator played with imagery, as a cunning harper with the strings of his harp? No. Because this speech and its humor had a moral which he deftly turned against the subsidy, or, as he expressed it in his peroration:

"My relation is simply that of trustee to an express trust. And shall I ever betray that trust? Never, sir! Rather perish Duluth! Perish the paragon of cities! Rather let the freezing cyclones of the bleak North-west bury it forever beneath the eddying sands of the raging St. Croix!"

Where did this Kentucky genius obtain his rich resources of illustration? First from nature, with its pine barrens, deadenings, and black snakes; next from patient culture, with his Homeric and other epical allusions; and next from mixing in the heat and dust of our extravagant active life, and studying the grand volume of human nature. A close student of men and books, once attorney-general of Missouri, familiar with frontier and prairie life, he had the rare perception to observe the queerness and oddity of things, and the rarer gift to so mix his colors and limn his figures that all should recognize beneath the heightened colors the graphic genuineness and design of his art. But the special humor of this Duluth speech lies in its magnifying, with a roaring rush of absurdity, the exaggerations of a Western Eden, in which utter nakedness and fragrant luxuriance alternate, and between whose aisles of greenery the sly devil of selfishness sat squat at the ear of Congress, tempting it to taste the forbidden fruit of subsidy. It is this string of spoken pearls, this effluence of diamond dew, this beguiling linked humor long drawn out, that holds the ear; but there is more meant than meets the sense. Like the allegory or the parable, there is moral hidden beneath this elaborate imagery. It is this moral which exalts the American mind to the sublimity of its own peculiar fun, and relieves the leviathanic lawlessness of exaggeration of its strain upon the faculties. No speech that I can recall produced at once so signal an effect.

I do not except General Butler when he addressed the House on the moiety question. He had an audience prepared to applaud. He had the accessories, the *mise en scène*, together with abundant gas-lights and personal spleen, to set off the whole for a grand effect. He suc-

ceeded, for no one could uptrip him or knock him down. Like the Dutch toy, he is ever up, rubicund and triumphant. When he drew out of the ship-hold those leaden statues representing the Goddess of Liberty and the Conscript Fathers, and described them as devices to avoid the customs duty, the shouts of laughter were loud and uproarious. Without detraction from this performance, I fail to find in it, or in any reported speech of General Butler, notwithstanding the skillful arrangement and statuesque poses by which he graced the fervor of that rhetoric hour, with a Mephistophelean-Brobdingnagian energy of fun, any comparison with this Duluth speech of Knott.

These efforts of Hardin, Corwin, Knott, and Butler are referred to, for the sake of showing one class of humor which is not strictly that of the House. It proceeds from the peculiar manner of the man. It is elaborate and descriptive narrative, depending for its success on its splendid burlesque of expression and thought. It is not peculiar to the Legislature. It would be felicitous in any forum.

XIII.

THE HUMORS OF LEGISLATIVE CHITCHAT.

"Let man send a loud ha! ha! through the universe, and be reverently grateful for the privilege."—DOUGLAS JERROLD.

THE previous analysis of our reasons for laughing with and at the deliberative mind, collectively and individually, has been directed to its humors. Their utility in debate has been defended. The attempt has been made to remove from them the reproach of inconsequential levity, while from different epochs of legislative history, and from other conspicuous sources, this element of parliamentary rhetoric has been illustrated.

It is now proposed to determine in detail the occasion and mode of using the various kinds of parliamentary weapons which are tempered by humor.

The liberty which allows so many levities is, as Mr. Hallam has said, "the slow fruit of ages." This indulgence is in proportion to the lusciousness of the fruitage. Just before and during our civil war, when men were almost on their knees in prayerful perplexity and trouble, as well as on their muscle and skill in great conflicts—the humor was not pleasant. In vital conflicts fun does not flow so readily. Shadow and sorrow do not make mirth. Thaddeus Stevens was, perhaps, an exception, but his flavor was not always saccharine. It grew out of the war. It was acidulous and sharp. Few "summer-sweets" were found in his orchard. If they were there, there were plenty of stones and clubs beneath the trees.

If I should generally characterize the humor of Congress in the twenty years of my knowledge of it, it should be said that the Forty-first and Forty-second Congresses had the rarer felicities. Do you ask why? Because the war was over, and reconstruction had begun to show itself in better temper. Again, do you ask, "Who should be selected from this period as the happy members?" Using my tests, first, the lapse of time, and, next, the translatability of the merry words, I should say that Edmunds, of Vermont, is the capital wit; but Thurman met him ever with exquisite cunning of fence. Then follows a constellation, comprising Tipton, Nye, Howe, Conkling, Casserly, and others in the Senate; and Schenck, Butler, Stevens, Dawes, Garfield, Ross, Proctor Knott, Johnson, of California, and a score of other members of the House, who answered well the call of genial debate.

But do not ask me, with my present sense of this almost divine gift, to elevate another class. There were some who used the emptiest and stalest platitudes for humor. Their assumed fun is simply excruciating. To have sweat great beads under their tame and stale repetitions has been my punishment. The very muck into which their seed is dropped, receptive and rich as it may be, failed to give the true aroma to their scrubby shrubbery. There is no geniality in their rough and splenetic oratory. It is not for me to "call gentlemen by name" in this analysis, though vitriol-throwers without wit should be pilloried for the good of society. But even the small debate and smaller humor have their uses. The Senate and House are better fitted by them for duty. Unlike the law, the law-maker does care for "little things."

The same law which forms the pearl rules the witty expression. Naturalists ascribe the origin of the pearl

to an irritation produced by the intrusion of a grain of sand or grit into the shell of the mollusk. This by a peculiar process is covered over with a calcareous secretion deposited in layers, and, lo! the pure and perfect pearl. It is this same audacious and gritty though small intruder which irritates till its priceless and creamy beauty is radiant with the rare iris of humor. Although humor, like the pearl, may only seem fit to be strung as an ornament to tickle vain minds "to mirth effuse," yet its utility is no less evident.

Quite a portion of the pearly chitchat, which gives zest and life to the daily routine of Congressional work and worry, laminated, little joke on joke, as pearls are formed, is that which concerns the personal foibles, the length of service, the manners, or the committee-work of members. Sometimes it is the bar-room and cross-roads talk, the badinage of the stump, the ignorant and ungrammatical fanfaronade, and the stupid brag of the Bobadils. Sometimes vulgarity competes with courtesy, and wins an apparent advantage until tested by taste and time. Yet such simple, and sometimes noisy, chitchat is not without its utility. It is far better than the forcible-feeble denunciations, spiteful wrangles, and pandemoniac—not to use O'Connell's phrase—"beastly howlings"—which fill the earlier *Globes*. These are associated with cries of "Order!" "order!" They brought forth at times the emblematic mace itself from its marble pediment. Often its silver eagle flew into the arena, restrained by the stalwart grasp of the sergeant-at-arms. If an American assemblage, when in a mobocratic mood, is not represented on such occasions by its Congressman, then has there been much slander on both. Our British Parliamentarians, as I have shown, are not mere babes and sucklings

when the legislative mood wills that the aurochs roar like all Bashan; but in this, have we degenerated in lung or liberty? An English writer has said that the transatlantic infant has a peculiar mode of crying in a series of sharp, spasmodic yelps, very different from the *sostenuto* howl of the British bantling, and with intonation as though it were prematurely striving to recite the Declaration of Independence with its mouth full of pea-nuts and pop-corn.

Conceding this to be a gross libel on the American infant, yet it has much discriminating truth when applied to the occasions referred to and to the full-grown American representative. "As grows the people, so the swaths expand."

On such occasions the startled reporters give signs of unusual interest as they nib their pens, and lean from the gallery, aroused for a fresh sensation. Often the faces of Washington and Lafayette, which flank the Speaker's desk, seem to scowl madly over the painful and bellicose scene. Is there no relief? Oh yes. Some sudden flash of fun is shot radiantly into the agitated assembly, and the roar dies into a chuckle of moderation. Hence these little humors rise into something of dignified solemnity, checking personal vituperation and fistic encounter. Once in a fierce and clamorous House, while Mr. Speaker Pennington was pitched at the top of his voice, a member of a military mind, just from the restaurant, took up the cry of "Order!" from the Speaker and cried out, "Arms!" and the arms dropped, amidst much merriment, and the order was enforced.

Let me, then, refer to some of the occasions and illustrations of this by-play of humor. The gentler sex is a frequent theme. The laughs, however, are too often

equivocal and reprehensible. Widows' pensions, the marriage and other relations, are subject to the usual bandy of unexpressed but suggested ribaldry. "My object was to reach the widows on the private calendar," says one. Another asks, "Does this army bill *embrace* washer-women as well as teamsters?" A bill is called up for the relief of certain widows. It is read by its title, "An Act for the relief of William A. Christian." Some one inquires, "What sort of a widow is that?" And amidst good nature the bill passes. The stage is not coarser than Congress in this respect, and a gallery of ladies makes no difference. A member says, "It is asserted that a good many of these clerks are married: I have seen the unhappy list." No matter what the subject, whether Topsy or "Thanatopsis," mention "women," and the old joke appears, ineradicably suggestive of something not said.

References to whisky and Democracy; to finance and its intricacies; to party shibboleths and motions for adjournment; to the youth and age of members, and by the member who would "not kick at nothing for fear of a sprain;" to the devil and the Lower House, where he presides; to old Jacob Townsend; to victorious election prophecies and news; to Daniel and the locked-jawed lions, and the other roaring lion—the lobby; to Sir Boyle Roche's mixed metaphor of rat, bird, and bud; to "loyality;"—these furnish the chitchat of debate. There are certain quotations very common, such as, "Ill fares the land;" and on funeral occasions that "storied urn" is sure to make an "animated bust." "Your gory locks" are as sure to be shaken as "the galled jade to wince." That jade has winced till she has quite lost her winsome ways. General Morris's woodman has so often been besought to "spare that tree," that the theme is hackneyed;

and Mr. Bryant's "drapery" has been a good deal crumpled by insane though pleasant "dreams." On solemn occasions there have been a sufficiency of "weeping hermits" dwelling around the Congressional Cemetery, to make a procession of the Middle Ages to the Holy Sepulchre. Dr. Fell, and the unreasoning prejudice which the poet entertained against that physician, and which he could not explain, constantly appears. Whether the doctor had given the poet the wrong medicine, or had injured him in a mysterious way, it is never explained why the doctor was disliked. Following the doctor, as a monument of his services, the "*perennius ære*" of Horace stands sublime, a classic model for the perpetual and brazen emulation of rhetoric art. Tweedledum and Tweedledee often had mightier differences than the members who went to Bladensburg in the gray of the morning to continue the previous day's courtesies with pistols. Ah, Swan of Avon! how often in the legislative hall has your deathless song "overcome us, like a summer cloud, without our special wonder," at the frequency of the iteration! How often has "man's inhumanity to man" made countless millions, outside and inside of Congress, mourn for the novelty of the phrase! Then, that lyric originality appealing for the return of the vilest sinner, with that vestal lamp, was as exhaustless as the widow's cruse of oil. *Nisi bonum* still lives along with the "*nil mortuiis*" a deathless eulogy! There is that gun grown rusty firing at duck and plover! No wonder the old fusil has so often kicked her owner over. More than thirty times, "thrice hath he been armed who hath his quarrel just," and yet justice overtook him in spite of his iron-clad investiture! Rarely has Tennyson been quoted. Now and then "In Memoriam" has invoked a funereal smile;

but only a dozen quotations have celebrated the hero and the horse that came through the mouth of hell with all that was left of the Six Hundred. The sore-eyed goddess of Justice, with bandages, must often have the "*fiat*" of justice, with the "*ruat*" of "*cælum*." Sometimes the man who was bitten by the mad dog is eulogized for the uses of veracity when the dog has a funeral. The man recovers from the bite; the dog invariably dies. How few are the mourners over that oft-repeated decease! Madame Roland has often approached the scaffold, and shrieked, "Oh, Liberty! what crimes are done in thy name!"

Why should there be immoderate fun over such an ungrammatical trialogue as this, unless whisky were in it?

First Senator. "This liquor sold at five dollars per gallon." Second Senator. "Was it good?" Third Senator. "Did you taste it? Was it copper-distilled?" First Senator. "We did, and it *were* good. It was steam distillation."

Sometimes there is a Champagne bead of sparkle even on whisky. The whisky tax is up, and its frauds are under discussion. Mr. Morrill. "A large amount is easily concealed." Mr. Edmunds. "Through a glass?" "Darkly," said another. "It is back-handed arithmetic," said General Schenck, "to suggest on the whisky tax that although the distiller loses at a dollar and a half per gallon, he makes it up by selling a large quantity."

The same member, on the same topic, told of an ingenious way of making revenue, but not for the Government. An illicit still has two partners. One partner runs the still, which is worth twenty dollars; the other informs on him, and gets three hundred dollars. They divide.

"Does my friend propose a discriminating duty on

books according to their contents?" referring to French novels, asks Judge Thurman of Mr. Conkling, who responds: "I would no more deprive your party of French novels than of other things which enter into its constitution."

Distilleries, by a certain bill, were to close Saturday night, and resume Monday. The holy horror of the Peoria member, Mr. Ingersoll, can hardly be described. "Two thousand bushels of the refuse, a day, will feed five thousand hogs and five hundred head of cattle from a distillery. It runs from November till May, and you require the hogs and cattle to fast one day out of seven during that time. God save the republic!" Sometimes these phosphorescent will-o'-the-wisps in the dreary Gehenna of debate arise from so dry a bone as the reference of a bill to a committee. A grave Senator once proposed to refer the subject under discussion—as to worms boring into a ship's bottom—to the "Committee on Mines and Mining!" Amendments to tax bills give rise to much of this small wit. Opposing a tax on musical instruments is destroying the "harmony" of legislation; inserting "corn-crackers" (poor whites) in place of "corn-shellers" (agricultural implements); striking out the word "grain" from "grain cradles," leaving the tax on the couch of babyhood; umbrellas, too, are "luxuries," and should be taxed; "clock springs and trimmings" give rise to an amendment complimentary to the ladies; "retorts" are amended by adding the word "courteous;" "flavoring extracts for cooking" is the occasion of a dash at Wethersfield and onions; "horn, horn-tips, and hoofs" is amended by adding "tails," to make the animal complete; "leggings" is stricken out, for the benefit of a border member's constituents, and so on.

A question arises as to taxing theatres. An amendment is offered that "performances" should not refer to the acrobatic sports of the House; then another amendment to insert after "sports" the words "zampillaërostateur, prestidigitateur, or A. Ward's wax-works." Thereupon arises a debate that would have honored John Brougham's "Columbus" burlesque. "You tax Falstaff and Hamlet, the sock as well as the buskin; 'London Assurance' has to pay for its presumption." "We tax 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts,'" cries out a serious judge of Massachusetts. "Othello," says another; and that strikes home to the last gentleman, whose politics are colorable. And thus the little quips go round. But, after all, Thespis had to pay taxes for his cast.

There are many laughs at advantages and opportunities gained or lost in the order of business and debate, and by the rulings of the chair, and even about the seats and propinquities of members. They are the domesticities of the legislative hearth, and are not to be counted except as the pleasant gossip of the household. They are hardly condiments to the table: they are rather *bonbons*. They are never too frequent, and seldom cloy. There is always a little humor over the point of engrossing or referring a bill. Such debates occur as to the order and postponement of business. The Senate was in a dead-lock one night. Senators Casserly and Edmunds locked horns, and the contest was on Locke. "My friend falls under the epigram of John Locke: he knows something, assumes a great deal, and jumps at a tremendous conclusion." "I may fall under the epigram of Locke," said the caustic Senator; "my friend falls under the lock itself." Rejoineth Casserly: "That retort takes so long to find out, it may be turned over to the next gen-

eration." In rebuttal: "Your children, then, will know what it means."

Said Judge THURMAN: "Not a word has yet been said about the *corpus* of this bill." Judge DRAKE: "Let us make this a *corpus delicti*." "It will be a *caput mortuum* soon," rejoined the judge. The lawyers are pleased. Such good temper saves hours of wrangle.

This Latin phrase, "*Non nostrum tantas componere lites*," was translated by a Yankee Senator, "Let every man skin his own game."

A member of the "American party," in 1855, was making a furious speech. It had in it, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori.*" Mr. Cumback objected to the use of foreign languages by a member of the American party.

The use of Latin is a theme for jocosities. When a Senator was called to account for using "*gravamen*," he asked forgiveness, as he understood about as much of Latin as his friend did of—English!

"I would like to ask the gentleman a question." All attend seriously. "Will you give way to — adjourn?" All laugh.

"I make a point," said a Senator, "that it is not in order before intelligent men to demonstrate an absurdity—such as the consistency of the other party." The point was not well taken. But the Senator on whom it was made found the laugh confusing.

"Gentlemen—Mr. President— No; I was addressing the Senate, and inadvertently called the body 'gentlemen.'" This was one of the natty hits of Nye.

"I would rather be a live aunt," said a member, in reply to General Schenck's remark as to the ants nibbling his tariff bill to death—"a live aunt—" When thus the general interposed, "Than a dead uncle."

A Senator had used the word "infamously." It was decided unparliamentary. He apologized, and was sorry: "but it had done its office before the country."

The Diplomatic Appropriation is up. "I move to strike out Greece." "No, no; *rub* it out," said Judge Peters, of Maine.

"Will the gentleman yield to adjourn?" "No, sir; I am intensely interested in the remarks I am making." Over this member hangs the cloud of obscurity. He deserves embalming, though nameless.

"The bill reads," said John Cochrane, "'For the prosecution of the work on the Capitol.' It should read, 'For the prosecution of those who work.'"

The Postmaster-general "totes civilization in his mail-bags, and lets it out all over the Indian country." This was Mr. Toombs's patois.

A Senator says, "The Senate keeps a bar, and is addicted to railing," referring to the counter of the "Hole in the Wall," by a *double-entendre.*

"*Experientia docet,*" said Caleb Cushing. To which Mr. Ingersoll, *sotto voce*: "*Nocet.*"

Referring to a former debate on the compromises of 1850, in which he had taken a part, Governor Corwin repeated and translated, amidst great laughter, the phrase, "*Quorum magna pars fui,*" as "A part of whom I was which."

Discussing the California seizure before the Mexican war, a member said: "If a foreign nation should conquer one of our States, her Senators would *ipso facto* be *functus officio.*" The Latin was made thus to laugh by the rhetorical Rhett.

Mr. Outlaw, of North Carolina, is declared *eo nomine* out of order. Some one asks Joseph R. Chandler what

keel-hauling is? He said it was a *hardship*. Did the Senator say that these steamers are planked with Southern pine? "Certainly, I said so." "That is a great *deal* better than Northern oak." This pun was from a Southern Senator, and had a sectional point beyond the verbal.

Have my readers ever heard of a "third-head speech?" It is not referred to in our standard works upon rhetoric, but a North Carolinian defined it: "Gentlemen, first I'll tell you what I know, and you don't know; second, what you know, and I don't know; and third, what neither you nor I know any thing about." The last is the *third* head.

"Three Congresses," said General Millson, "have I been a member of—Malus, Pejor, and Pessimus; and this is the worst."

A hippodrome for army exercises is under discussion. "Riding in a house," it is called by a euphemism. It is at once American and original.

"White male American citizens, or any such persons who have declared their intention to become such!" This was the phraseology of a Territorial bill. It was a laughable blunder—made so by a query: "How can they intend to become such *male* citizens?"

Mr. Zollicoffer had his vote, notwithstanding his absence. If members were within the bar before the next name on the roll was called they were entitled by an old rule to vote, and so it was humorously ruled for him as he was last on the list! Once being absent when my name was called, it was good-humoredly allowed that I might vote on the suggestion to spell it with a K!

A bill is before the House to pay a pension during the "natural life;" but Mike Walsh did not care whether the

man's life was natural or unnatural—he wanted to pay him for life only.

There was a dead-lock in the Senate; no quorum. "Is any thing in order," said Mr. Hale, "except silent contemplation of this state of affairs? I mean what I say. That is so uncommon here, that I am not understood," said the same inveterate wit.

"The Indians were to be carried so far West that sunset wouldn't find them." This is President Monroe's recorded joke, and often repeated in Congress until recently. "I do not like to be backbitten to my face—and not respond." "I want to bring this railroad bill within gunshot of the Constitution." A public building has two sides faced with stone. It is called as absurd a botch as a linen shirt with a cotton bosom. Then the point is made that as most members wear a cotton shirt with a linen bosom, the building is not botch-work!

"It is not law; it is not sense; it is not good nonsense." "The relapse," referring to President Tyler's change from Whig to Democrat, "was worse than the disease." "Gentlemen need courage, brandy-and-water, or delirium tremens to bring them to the sticking-point." "Is not the Indian a native American?" asked Mr. Roosevelt. "No; that is a Virginia abstraction," said another. "Between the Blue Mountains and Rocky Ridge it never rains," said a Celtic member, "winter or summer, save a short period in the spring." "The gentleman takes me up before I am down." "If there is one good thing the President has done," said a member with the proud consciousness of admiring a just chief magistrate, "one good thing, sir, I would gladly mention it."

"I hope the gentleman does not suppose—" Mr. Wise. "Not at all"—meaning he was after something stronger

than mere supposition. The filmy question was clipped by the razor-edge before it floated in on the House. "There is a class here, sir, that always gobbles with the turkeys and roosts with the roosters. They vote with Polk and talk with Santa Anna." "Did this soldier desert his wife to serve in the army, or desert the army to serve his wife?" "I admit he shot the man; but he did it with small shot. It didn't hurt much!" "The gentleman says the newspapers supplied us with brains. Who supplied *him* with that essential commodity?" "It is curious that there should be so many 'points of order' in so disorderly a body." A member moves to strike out two words as surplusage. He is complimented profusely for his first and grand effort at economy. A member states with refreshing ambiguity that he knew his colleague was in order in voting, as his head went over the *bar*, just after his name was called. "If I were to obtain rays of moonshine and concentrate them, I could get a certificate in a few hours that they were indestructible." He stated a scientific truth; but he did not intend to be either chemically correct or legislatively serious.

A gentleman is called to order for wandering irrelevancy. "Allow me first to reach Paraguay; if not, I must stop at the equator or here. My own point is 32° 20′. That is my initial point." He was on manifest destiny, and went on.

"The gentleman complains that I did not allow his party a whole geological era to reform abuses. Sir, by that time we shall be fossil remains ourselves."

"I do not want one thing asked for Esau, when Jacob is to benefit by it."

Mr. Hale, considering his mind doubtful on a certain

point, proposed to pair off with two adverse Senators from Indiana.

The longest debates are on the waste of time in useless talking. There was no Congress like that of 1853 for these discussions. One day a member arose, and said, "We have shown such a disposition to work to-day, it would be a pity to do it;" and the committee rose.

A point of order is made on an amendment as to the use of liquors in the navy as a beverage. "Liquor is not *germane*," says one; another inquires if it is *lager?*

A petition on Spiritualism and its occult mysteries was presented to the Senate. It was moved to refer it to the Foreign Affairs, or the "three thousand clergymen." It was suggested, finally, to lay it on the table, without a rap of dissent from spirit or gavel.

The previous question cut off debate on a bill which Colonel Benton opposed. "Sir," said he, "it covers up what is to be done; but I can look as if I were opposed to the bill, at any rate."

A member looks at the clock; his time is out; he sees the lifted gavel. How gracefully he yields to the succeeding gentleman, provided he does not speak too long.

What rare good temper was there in 1855, when Senators Pearce, of Maryland, Douglas, Butler, of South Carolina, and Badger—all regents at one time of the Smithsonian—forgot science to be molecules of this parliamentary microcosm. Their ways were ways of pleasantness, and their paths were peaceful. One of these Senators once called legal points "technical funnels." Once, in debating the sanctity and legality of proofs, Butler was contending that the tombs of Pulaski and Nathaniel Green were higher evidence than the "ambulatory parol;" then, dashing in upon Senator Toombs, who was

contradicente, he said, "In Georgia they resort to an almanac, and think it good evidence for any thing it contains."

Many of these light effusions merely hang on the verge of mirth, are merely verbal passages; they turn on a word or a phrase, or hardly on any thing; but by some felicity they tickle the midriff of the body.

MORE VERBAL HUMORS.

Once, in Parliament, Lord Mounteagle made a delicately subtle play on the name of the economist, Joseph Hume. There was method in it, as he said, "To err is *Hum*-an." Mr. Hume forgave him divinely. But was it any worse than this? "I would have Mr. Hale excused, because he is not *hearty*." Or this: "The gentleman is inflamed. Let him be put out!"

A New Yorker wanted the opposition to be sworn over again, as the "old swear" to the Constitution had "run out."

Said General Nye, "There is only one part of finance I understand—disbursement." "Quack medicines" were defined by some member as "half poison and half profit."

"*Primâ facie*," as defined by a Vermonter, "is a case good on its face, but bad in the rear."

"This immense sum is for a movable dam, is it? It would be better to say a 'damnable move;'" and the bill gave way before the incursive wit of Judge Thurman.

Senator Bayard insisted, in a dire emergency, on knowing what the "parliamentary hinge" had to do with the "dead-lock." He oiled the hinge and enlivened the lock by so small a play.

"The Senator was misrepresented. He did not say the Governor would be canonized in thirty years, but

cannonaded for thirty years." This was a touch of Tipton, and it took as it titillated.

That was rather a serious joke made in the Thirty-ninth Congress upon a Western Virginian. He had been defending the agricultural appropriation and the commissioner. Attention was drawn to the expenditures, in which a Mr. *Et Al* figured extensively. "I do not know who he is. Perhaps a friend of the gentleman from West Virginia," said an Iowa member. That gentleman disavowed aiding Mr. *Et Al* to his place in the department. "No, sir," he exclaimed, indignantly, when still urged by the great laughter; "I deny the charge, sir, that I recommended any one but the wives and daughters of our brave soldiers!"

"Preposteriosity" is a word used by Carl Schurz. Mr. Morrill, of Vermont, at once hoped such inflation of words would be banished when we resumed!

"What is the matter with the jail of the District?" "I have never been in it myself," answers a member. This was uttered in simplicity, and received with risibility by those deliberating on a fresh appropriation for the jail.

I have known quite a play on the words "hash" and "rehash," with very saucy and various application to a certain kind of speaking.

"If you put a man in charge of the Commissary Department, you have to make him a brigadier-general; but of what?" "Of bean-soup," said some one, in response to General Logan, who was laboring by ridicule to reduce the army expenses.

A new word is in the finance bill—"refund." It is objected to as unusual. "Of all funds in the world I dislike," said Garrett Davis, with a merry ring to his voice, "it is a *refund*."

A Texas member, in fighting what he called barnacles on the Indian service, introduced a frontier phrase—"Quaker policy." He explained it as the humane policy which, with Bible in hand, tries to bear conviction to the Indian mind that their habit of cutting off other men's hair is injurious, if not wicked.

A bill to relinquish land for a cemetery is called up. A Senator declines to yield. "What! not yield to a cemetery? You will at last."

Thus, words in their transitive and unexpected application have as much to do with humor as with logic; or, rather, in the very caprice of a word and its ambiguity may lie the fallacy of fun. When definite ideas are not attached to particular words, when usage runs counter to the dictionary or other meaning, not only puns are possible, but correct reasoning impossible. "Gardez-vous de l'équivoque!" is an admonition of logic; but, as many examples cited show, its disregard is the source of much pleasantry. Philology is, in many aspects, a comic science. Mr. Mill has seriously considered many remarkable instances where words have received odd meanings by casual associations. In our first chapters, we have shown how easily the American invents and manufactures his social and political terminology. Oftentimes the original meaning of a word is left to its fate. It receives, after many vicissitudes, new connotations. It is applied in a narrower or wider sense. Take the word *'squire*, or, as a Vermonter would say, "'square"—it once meant an owner of a landed estate; or *pagan*, which once was restricted to a villager; or *villain*, to a subject of feudal bondage, and a thousand other words, which have afforded "diversion" to others besides Purley. Not to speak of words in all languages, and used too frequently

in every forum, which have bifold meanings with respect to chastity and religion, there are many which have loose secondary and analogous senses to denote special meanings which provoke a smile. Indeed, they sometimes rise into the elegance of wit, as well as the cogency of logic. We can at once understand why a profligate is called "irregular," and "the acceptance of a consideration" the receipt of a salary, or other *quid pro quo.* It is a positive pleasure to follow the change of the word *bigot*, which in Spain meant a mustache, through its transformations into exclusiveness in religion; and when we trace the word *rival* to its source, and find it start from *river*, to signify the water claimants on either side of a stream, there is a spice of wit in its very history. The English language is an amalgam rich in synonyms.

HUMOR OF STATISTICS.

Not only words, but numerals, have been dressed in fantastical array, and have been made literally to cut a funny figure. Frigid statistics thaw into humor, and help to give a merry tone to dry detail. How the House laughed at the mortality of the Maine regiments as compared with that of New York! It was a question of rations and liquor. The tax and the Maine law played their part in the debate. New York stood 52, but Maine 124; and temperance was shown to be unhealthy, and Maine and its members demoralized. And the House found the figures funny.

Once Senator Edmunds proposed an amendment to an appropriation so artfully as to change the $20,000 for goods to that sum for transportation, and the $5000 for transportation to the cost of the goods. It had pertinency against the inordinate cost of transportation.

One member, to get a hearing, pleads that he has stood on this bill until his legs are two inches shorter than they were a week ago.

The "force" of the gentleman's speech, said some one on the impeachment trial, is reckoned at thirty-three thousand words.

"It is alleged," said a Californian, "that we have traded away fifteen million dollars for Alaska, and have only one million's worth of real estate. Any man who can't trade within fourteen hundred per cent. of the value of an article ought to be expelled. Such a Congress, sir, no longer deserves the confidence of a free people."

There was an Indian debate. It was asserted in 1867 that it cost over six millions for a regiment in the Indian country. One Indian was killed, and, said Senator Windom, by way of lively comment, "Six millions for one Indian, and it is still doubtful whether he is dead or alive!"

The taking of the census of 1850 was before the Senate. A Southern Senator wanted to know how many bass-wood hams, horn flints, and wooden nutmegs had been made, for was not the South interested as a consumer?

Mr. Campbell, of Ohio, was showing the percentage of population as to reading and writing, and found Buncombe County, North Carolina, the lowest, when Mr. Ashe asked for the comparative statistics of crime. This posed the Ohioan; for a moment he admitted that Northern penitentiaries showed most convicts, and by a quick turn said, "Oh! we punish our rascals."

Mr. Venable, in a glow of statistical inflammation, exclaimed, "You vote against giving bounty lands to sailors, while you are voting them to railroads, and have given forty-two millions of swamp lands, which would in-

clude the top of Mount Ararat, for the flood passed over that once!" He was called to an account, and at once withdrew "Ararat" from the discussion.

"How many light-houses are there in that district?" it was asked. "Five." "I saw more," said a member. "They are double-reflectors," was the witty rejoinder. "Perhaps you saw double," said another.

How well Mr. Toombs put the proposition for increase of wages! "Let him do the work, and give him six hundred dollars. Make him do no work, only superintend, and he gets a thousand dollars."

Mr. Corwin, showing that his political opponents had changed in eight years, proceeded to divert the House by a calculation of how many times the Wandering Jew would have changed had he been as fickle as his opponents. But how happily he hit off these mutabilities, and excused them! "'Man is of few days, and full of sorrow; cometh forth like a flower, is cut down, and fleeth away like a shadow.' Long may the Democracy live! for if they were to die suddenly, they would die in their sins."

When the great fire of New York occurred, a petition to remit duties was presented to Congress. An eloquent man was named to present it—Mr. Horace Everett, of Vermont. He began effectively. He said, "The sun of yesterday looked upon a great and prosperous city; the sun of this morning looked down upon the same city, and disclosed fifty acres of it covered with ruins!" When a New York member rose to correct the statement, it was "fifty-three acres and a half!" This was told by Governor Seward to belittle a point made upon him about fractions.

Once I had the misfortune, without much intention, to

destroy the beautiful beginning of a speech about maritime affairs, made by a colleague from Staten Island. With a splendid voice, he told the astonished House that England had so encouraged her marine that on Trafalgar Square she had erected a splendid monument to Nelson, her great sea-captain, one hundred and sixty-three feet high. I begged "just there" to interrupt him to have a petition on commerce from Peck Slip read. The descent of my friend was that of a meteor from the zenith and into the nadir. "How could you—*how* could you leave me, like Simon Stylites, perched on such a monumental eminence?" was his exclamation afterward.

"You can't eat all we raise," said a Western member. "We must have a foreign market. If you consume all our grain, pork, and beef, you must be able to eat a barrel of pork at a single sitting, and to eat six meals a day at that!"

"How much Mexican land," said Mr. Giddings, "will reimburse us for the war, when every acre is a loss?"

The Pacific telegraph was being considered. If the corporator fails, Uncle Sam pays; if the scheme succeeds, the corporator pockets the profits; and thus the argument was proceeding, until a Senator asked the speaker, "Would you invest in it?" "If the United States will guarantee me seven per cent., and my friend will lend me the money at six, I will do it."

A most humorous mode of keeping an account of the old State claim of South Carolina against the United States was analyzed laughably by Senator Fessenden. It proves him to be a shrewd fiscal agent. In this case the officers of the State went so far as to keep an account with the State, crediting it with interest accumulating on the principal; and if there was any left, they then took

the part they had paid, cast interest on that, and then offset the two! That is to say, they paid their principal in part, and retained to themselves the right of offsetting the interest which accrued on their own payment of money due to the State, to pay the rest of the debt with!

In an earlier chapter we have remarked that an American stops at no sacrifice for his fun. Arithmetic, logarithms, census returns, tabular statements, and other cold, hard facts and figures fall before his irresistible attack, when inspired with his laughing demon. Redundancy of words, embellishment of style, principles and reasons, major and minor premises, validity or fallacy in argument, all bow before this genius. He will have his fun in season and out of season. He has Bottom's ambition. He would play many parts. It is recorded of Sol Smith that he played the High-priest of the Sun, the Blind-man, the Sentinel, the Secretary, Rolla, and the Spanish Army all at once, in the play of "Pizarro!" So the American legislator, with his infinite mercurialities, does not scruple to laugh at numeration, and would not hesitate to guffaw at the integral calculus. His humor plays in every rôle known to human inquiry, and recks little how much moral indignation he excites. "Not all the pumice of the polished town" can smooth down this native tendency.

It is said of Charles Lamb that his wit was so gentle that his benign heart would have recoiled from a sarcasm inscribed upon a grave-stone. There is something equally shocking in drawing figures within the precincts of humor. Hastily let us close this chapter. We tread on sacred ground, where no chartered libertine of debate should intrude. "This, sir, is a true, but a very melancholy recital," said "Single-speech Hamilton," in 1762, when debating a bill for additional forces against Spain;

"for who can hear, without pain, the profusion of the public money treated as a selected topic of facetiousness and humor;" and yet the famous orator of the solitary speech had just said, quizzically, that he had seen ninety thousand pounds advanced partly for manufactures without material, and partly for navigations without water!

XIV.

LEGISLATIVE HUMORS—PERSONALITIES.

"They touch the ground, to jollily rebound."
ROBERT BROWNING'S *Inn Album.*

THE pungency of wit is seldom associated with mere phraseological conceits. This element of legislative life, though it gives vivacity to the session, as shown in the last chapter, is to be found in a higher grade of humor. I propose to characterize it in the following order: First, personalities and localities, and their points; second, defending the bad by the fallacy of fun; third, pithy narration and application of anecdote; fourth, apt repartee and retort, and cunning suggestion and diversion; fifth, argumentation, epigram, burlesque, and irony; and, lastly, those miscellanies which defy classification.

First. Personalities.

An allusion to the personal appearance of a member excites as much, if not more, fun in the English Parliament than in our Congress. When Colonel Sibthorpe said that he did not like the countenances of the ministers opposite, as their faces were the index of the mind, there was an artillery of explosions. But O'Connell, in reply, turned the House upside down with its echoing roars by referring to the gallant colonel's own face, bushily bearded all over; and he (O'Connell) "would not abate a single hair on the point of good humor." The famous pasquinade of the same great Irish orator was

made upon the same theme—whiskers—and on the same Colonel Sibthorpe, "to beard whom Nature had shaved" the other two obnoxious and bigoted members!

Could any thing be finer than O'Connell's compulsory apology? "I said you were composed of six hundred scoundrels, and I am very sorry for it!" It was the royal purple upon his frieze coat. It was a personal generality, with the subtlest ambiguity of regret. It was worth a centennial birthday celebration, in which it played a festive part. But when was O'Connell at a loss for words of subtle flame any more than Thaddeus Stevens? Of the ready wit of both it may well be said, as Sheil said of the former, that, with the improvidence of his countrymen, he flings forth a brood of robust offspring upon the world, without a thought apparently as to how they are to be clad.

The same kind of personal risibility which O'Connell provoked on the hirsute Sibthorpe was produced in Congress when General Farnsworth referred to General Butler's face, and the latter got tangled in the long beard of the gallant Illinoisan. But there is too much venom in such allusions to be enjoyable. Henry Clay's supreme and genial jocosity is better. He had a habit of making merriment at ex-President Buchanan's peculiarity of optics, to which I have referred, with such a Palmerstonian *bon-homie* that no offense was or could be taken. A member should not be too earnestly bent on his dignity or his wisdom. What said *Punch?* "What does Plimsoll mean by being so terribly in earnest?" All accounted him overstrained in his mind! He was excused for insanity.

The Farnsworth and Butler vendetta was caustic, if not clerical. Although now and then a playful personal allusion is drawn from Scripture, it evidenced more the at-

tention which these soldier-statesmen paid to the Scriptures as sources of rhetorical inspiration than of pious inclination. Referring to General Butler's former Democracy, General Farnsworth said, "The light which dawned upon him shames and darkens the light that gathered around the head of St. Paul. Like Peter, also, his desertion was so recent that he was obliged to curse and swear to make the people believe it was genuine." On another occasion, when twitted by an opponent for voting in 1860 for Jefferson Davis, Butler responded, "I did then, but would not now; you did not then, but would now!"

Ex-President Tyler once touched the Senatorial vein of pleasantry by referring to the firm of "Madison, Grundy, John Holmes, and the Devil!" He remarked that Mr. Grundy had retired, leaving his Satanic majesty to take care of the remaining partners!

Mr. Hawes, of Kentucky, on the French debate in 1835, to which reference has already been made, defending Quincy Adams from a general attack, said that "he did not like to see the gentleman from Massachusetts, whose long career had been crowned by that brightest of all crowns, the suffrage of a free people, exposed to a rifle here, a musket there, and a pop-gun over yonder!" That pop-gun was not so frequently fired for the rest of the session.

Our rules, like those of the Commons, try to guard against personalities. They forbid the use of members' names. The French and Spanish are less punctilious on this point. But while the rule is not observed in Congress, as it used to be, there is no embarrassment in making it apparent to whom allusion is made. Some members are at once recognized by a reference to their seat or locality, to their committee, or to their hobby. No reference to the red man in the late Congresses would

have been complete without it pointed at General Shanks, of Indiana, just as a reference to a tragic manner or to pig-iron immediately suggests an accomplished Pennsylvanian. Once I had occasion to insist on having macaroni kept on the free list. A long and red-haired, tall, lank, and odd member, full of complaisance, opposed it, as he said that he did not affect the dish. It was foreign; it was not nice. A playful allusion to his being fed on the badly manufactured native article was an *ad hominem* that brought forth a round of fun from the House, and from him the exclamation that he once promised his wife never to find fault with his *vittels*, and he never would again!

That was a very clever turn Senator Conkling made upon Judge Thurman last Congress. "When the Senator turns about and addresses me, as he has half a dozen times, does he expect me to respond?" said the judge, just a little nettled. "When I speak of the law, I turn to the Senator as the Mussulman turns toward Mecca. I look to him only as I would look to the common law of England, the world's most copious volume of human jurisprudence." Those who know the judicial aspect of the Senator from Ohio will appreciate the force and elegance of this superb badinage.

The "long gentleman's speech," by an amusing mistake, is used for a short Senator who made a long speech, and the ripple of fun runs around at Garrett Davis.

The question of specie payments was under discussion in 1866, and so, in clamoring for them, was Long John Wentworth. He begged Mr. Stevens to lead them on to specie. "I believe it can be done," said Long John. Whereupon Mr. Stevens responded, "My friend is large, but he has faith, like a grain of mustard-seed."

John Morrissey was once ordered to be arrested, under a call of the House. Mr. Eldridge, of Wisconsin, amusingly suggested two sergeants-at-arms for the apprehension of the gladiator.

Senator Conkling, famous for his hyacinthian lock, one day inadvertently referred to the old abolition times, when politicians thought it injurious to say that their hair curled. Of course, in the remarks which followed by another Senator, the blonde curl of Conkling became crisp with more than Numidian elegance.

"When he took New Orleans, he took it, and all in it." And the laugh that time was at one who could stand it. A member is called a blunderbuss without powder and shot. Another, with a wig, is reminded that Absalom would not have been hung on that oak-tree if he had been covered as the honorable gentleman! A member, while our historian was a Cabinet minister, made an unintentional reference to the "ghost of Bancroft." General Breckenridge, defending himself from having been a Whig, said the error sprung from the fact that "his principles skipped one generation in the family. Part of them deflected from the right line." A member by the name of Smart was noisily interrupted. He exclaimed: "I have a better cause than that of Brutus. 'Hear me for my cause, and be *silent* that you may hear!'" "There's no more chance for this bill than that you, Mr. Chairman, or the next best man, will be translated to heaven for holiness."

Mr. White, of Indiana, quite celebrated upon the stump, told the old story of the servant who was sent to count his master's pigs. He counted six. One little spotted fellow jumped about so that he could not count him at all." Mr. KENNEDY. "Do you allude to me?"

"Oh no! you are genuine. I can always count you." The uncounted pig was an Indiana colleague, who had "Tylerized."

The Army Bill was being debated, especially that part relating to the officers' horses. General Curtis and Colonel Humphrey Marshall had been in the Mexican war. They were prominent in the debate. Colonel Marshall was pre-eminent for his Falstaffian proportions, with a humor not unlike that of the fat knight. "How many constructive horses did you ride, when colonel commanding in Mexico?" asked the Iowa soldier. "Never any by construction; three actually; and I nearly rode their tails off." The House had monstrous fun at this unctuous interlarding of remarks.

"My record, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Davis, of Massachusetts. "Why a statute of limitations of ten years answers my purpose—nothing longer than three weeks will answer that of the gentleman."

"The member has remarked that he has not opened his mouth to-day, either in a speaking or any other capacity." "Fortunately for both of us," is the playful rejoinder.

A "record" is a terrible matter to a debater. It touches his integrity and consistency, and invariably provokes fierce answer. "You can not assail my record." "I do not go into small matters," is the retort. "I do, for I shall answer *you*." "Then discuss yourself and magnify little things;" and then worse and worse, till rhetorical flies buzz in the air, and personal stinging insects hum; and then the irritating personality is composed with Pickwickian cordiality. This colloquy happened in 1858; the interlocutors were Egyptians, from Illinois.

A member with enormous voice and dervish gestures sits down at the end of his hour all dripping with sweat. The pearly beads of industry are upon his forehead. They make canals of his corrugations and pools at his feet. How is his elaborate and laborious speech answered? "The principal objection," said a meek, gentle voice in response, "is that that speech is not sufficiently earnest and emphatic." It was the roar of Boanerges and the labors of Hercules, followed by a love-tap of Beauty.

Sweat plays quite a part in legislative oratory. A colleague once failed to vote in time. He told the House that he was streaming with perspiration in running from his tavern; and the perspiration furnished the hydrostatic power which pressed his vote indelibly upon his country's annals. He was permitted to vote. A friend was once sitting in the gallery with a French lady. The stranger looked down for the first time on the agonizing, wild, clattering, restless, belligerent, defiant, riant, raging sea of faces and words, noise and disorder, apparent below. The French lady is at first horrified. She thinks of the Commune, and its petroleum and fury. Finally she finds her native tongue, and wit enough to ask, "Mon Dieu! comme on parle içi! C'est comme si quelqu'un avait mangé leur soupe!" Heavens! how they talk! Some one has stolen their dinner! An English writer hits off this tendency to make long perspiring speeches in Parliament. He attributes them to the lawyers. It is the long robe for the long speech; warm work and copious sweats for the wool-sack. The guerdon is preferment in prospect. "I have never seen a performer so interesting as you," said the Sultan to a French dancer. "Dance that again." Visions of Cashmere shawls, Persian silks,

Golconda jewels, whole revenues of provinces, also danced before the dancer's eye. "Approach," said the Sultan, as he withdrew his chibouk from his mouth. The trembling and expectant performer approaches. "I have seen señoras and señoritas, dancers and *danseuses*, from all lands, but never, never before one with such perspiration. Adieu!" The story has an Oriental moral pertinent to Occidental oratory. It is this: you do not always gain by the sweat of your brow.

The intensity of personal effort in Congress furnishes a constant theme of wonder to the crowded galleries. On some days the House is utterly unconscious of its ridiculous clamor and personal belligerency, and on others the scene is a theme for its own pleasantry.

The same exultation—which Hobbes insists to be an element of humor—which enjoys the points made on the able and conscientious men of the House when they are caught at a disadvantage, by a parity of reason favors any point made by the weaker or disabled members. This humor properly comes under the head of personality. When a colored member makes a hit, it is reckoned the better for the social disability of the source. The retort of the African, even when feeble, is received with exhilaration, if not with rapture. It is the disadvantage which the lawyer feels when a saucy girl witness heads him off in a cross-examination. The wonder is not that the picture is so fine, but did not the artist execute it under some sort of disadvantage—as it were, with his toes? Or rather, as Dr. Johnson said of dancing dogs, the marvel is, not that they dance so well, but that they dance at all. We have had during the past few years some half-dozen colored members. They have not, with one exception, shone aloft and alone like stars or the primal virtues.

The ratiocinative is not conspicuous in their elocution, but it was compensated for by their quick susceptibility to humor.

It is not pretended that personalities have in them the least particle of pure reasoning. The object of all systems of logic is to arrive at the truth. Knowledge and faith are the desirable acquisitions most important to our varied interests. They are none the less desirable in framing laws for great communities. How, then, can we obtain true information upon which to legislate—how examine evidence and draw conclusions—except through language unstained by personal conflict, and ideas untinctured with personal prejudice? No blind impulse, or subtle intuition, or keen intellect, will answer the purpose, unless restrained and directed by well-conceived principle. But what if the principle be obscured by fallacy and obfuscated by illogical methods and bad men? Ah! then logic allows, nay commands, us to use the *ad hominem*. We may, then, destroy the pirate's stronghold with all the enginery of Aristotle.

There is a fallacy known as the *ignoratio elenchi*. It lies in the ignorance of the contradictory of an opponent's assertion. When we fall into this ignorance, instead of proving the contradictory, or *elenchus*, we attempt to establish something like it; but as it is substantially the same thing to prove what was not denied as to disprove what was not asserted, the fallacy is used to establish our own proposition as well as for the feigned refutation of our opponent's. There is no sophism so common as this. It is a sign of passion and zeal without knowledge. There is an issue joined on wrong points, or there is no issue at all. The colored disputants who argued an hour, both on the same side, have their coun-

terfeit presentments in Congress. One antagonist forgets the principle; another, the details; contradictories and contraries, particulars and generals, are mingled in confusion; and while one makes out a case which nobody denies, the other establishes what is utterly irrelevant; while one fights a word and its meaning, or a collateral idea which has no connection with the main argument, the other is overwhelmed with appeals to the prejudice of the audience, or drowned in a raging sea of drollery and ridicule. The apparent victor may be the illogical antagonist. He may make an unfair use of personal opinions or of respected authority, or triumph by an appeal to the passions, or use any other method, except that to the judgment, or the *argumentum ad judicium.*

Still, logicians admit that it is legitimate and fair to silence the advocates of falsehood, or to convince the weak and foolish by the reminder that, whatever may be the truth, your opponent is not the man to contest your proposition. Herein lies the only value of those humors which so often take the form of personalities.

XV.

LEGISLATIVE HUMORS—LOCALITIES.

"Argutos inter strepit anser olores."—VIRGIL.

"The goose gabbles midst the melodious swans."

NOT unlike the personal hints referred to in the last chapter are those which consist in taking off localities. This is a favorite theme for laughter; although, like personality, it is not a high order of logic. Hence the motto prefixed to this chapter.

Dickens made his description of our new Eden, as Proctor Knott did of Duluth; but, whether located in one section or another, such grotesque allusions to the *locus in quo* of members is enjoyed as if it were a "*tu quoque.*"

Morris's story of the "Little Frenchman and his Water-lots" is familiar. They were situated on Long Island. The principal street of the city was visible at low tide. He was rowed out to them as they were under water—"de ground vas all vatare." He had thrown his money away on the land. Of this he was assured, and he was politely requested by the shrewd Yankee vender to utilize his lots by drowning himself in them. This story has often been told to show the value of certain lands in a peculiar locality, in connection with Congressional grants and other legislation.

How Mr. Rollins, of Missouri, played his jet of fun on watery Cairo! His steamboat landed passengers in the third story of its first-class hotel. In the very heart of

the new city the cry of the faithful boatman is "No bottom!" Upon another occasion another member remarked that Cairo was one of the rising cities of this Union! To which, "Has it risen above high-water yet?" was the apt response.

"It was an ancient enactment," said a Pennsylvania Senator, "of Connecticut that no girl should get married until she could bake a doughnut whose twist would last a year." The Blue Laws and Puritan observances were often adverted to with this kindly regard.

We remember the impeachment trial. How important a part a Delaware witness played. He swore that the "eyes of Delaware" were on the Executive conduct and War Department. What trepidation followed! In vain the Chief-justice rapped "Order!" The laugh would be renewed.

Delaware has sometimes received a slap for being small; but only when small States or men are pretentious do good men assail their diminished proportions. A Senator from Delaware cries out, "If Delaware had the physical force, sir, she would hurl you from her borders should you attempt it." To which a Maine Senator, with a *sang-froid* such as becomes an ice-bound coast, "hoped the day was far distant when the nation would array itself against Delaware." "Or," added another, as the laugh grew lively, "Delaware array itself against the nation!"

Wisconsin once had a difficulty. The United States had given up a part of the State to Illinois and Indiana. Her delegate gave notice that if we did not give it back she would fight the whole nation. "True," he exclaimed, "it is an unequal contest; but the people of Wisconsin would appeal to the God of Battles!" This, too, was received as laughable gasconade.

A member once moved an appropriation for a post-office building at Confederate Cross-roads, and the repair of Bascom's grocery. Kentucky took it as personal.

"Where is the Seekonk River?" "In Rhode Island." "How long is it?" "Four hundred yards," answered Cowan, of Pennsylvania. "Oh, longer than that," said the Senator from Rhode Island. Judge TRUMBULL. "There's no such river. It is not in the bill." "Well, it's in the State, anyhow," said Governor Anthony.

Mr. Tipton once used the spirit of the wit of Dean Swift about De Foe. "The man who was in the stocks—I forget his name," said Swift. So TIPTON. "The gentleman from—I wish the State were larger; it is so hard to think of its name." "Rhode Island?" suggested Judge Trumbull.

Mr. Polk once said that a duel was fought in Rhode Island by a North Carolinian. He was demanded by the governor of Rhode Island; and wrote that the next time he went there to shoot, he would fire across the State.

"In Rhode Island," it was said by her Senator, "we kill our calves and sell the milk. In some States they raise up their calves; and if they have no occupation at home, send them abroad—sometimes to Congress." But Governor Weller, in response, was sure that all the calves had not been killed off in Rhode Island.

When, however, League Island, near Philadelphia, was asking appropriations, Anthony returned the compliment by similar ridicule. "There was an iron-clad took fire on that island," said he, "and there was not water enough to put it out."

Senator Cole represented California. He had charge of appropriations, and he, too, had made an adverse dash

at League Island. The Pennsylvania Senator (Scott) intimated that a noted example taught that all good works should begin at Jerusalem, and, therefore, that Mare Island, California, was a good place to begin. The ever-felicitous Edmunds, well up in geography, remarked, "Mare Island is not Jerusalem." Mr. COLE. "No, far from it." This was Ionic in softness and Attic in elegance.

But a Senator from Rhode Island is not always the man to touch upon localities. This Governor Anthony has often experienced. Who was it said that a traveler on horseback, stopping overnight, and hitching his horse in Rhode Island, was sued in trespass twice next morning — once in Massachusetts, for his horse eating oats from a field in that State, and again, at the same time, for his kicking down a stone fence in Connecticut? Some one once intimated that Rhode Island was a large State, for it had two capitals!

It is a common ruse of the opposition to the indiscriminate appropriation for rivers, that some one offers to improve a river of no name or consequence. Judge Carter, of Ohio, once moved ten thousand dollars for an humble creek, call Tuscarawas. How he glorified it ironically! It was a very important river; it began to flow just after Noah landed; it was interesting in its Indian legendary; it had national commerce before Columbus came; bark canoes floated down, and easier than up, its stream; and but for the Tuscarawas and some other streams, where would be the paternal Mississippi? It was just as important as the Illinois. The Illinois was the objective point of this irony. For this badinage, the facetious member was called Dan Rice; and yet was not his point in the very line of Whately's or Devey's canons of pure

logic? Even Cicero, as well as Horace, held to the keen forces of ridicule. Did they not cut the Gordian knot of vexatious matters? What answer could be returned to them by regular argument? How else can be defeated unmeritorious legislative log-rolling? The Pascagoula Creek, in Mississippi, was called up for a fine sum; and it was urged by a parity of absurdity, that, as a salt-barge had once been sunk in it ten years before, there was "a port of entry" on its margin.

A member, to secure an appropriation on the last night of the session, prefaced his amendment with a vote to the able, dignified, and impartial speaker, and that five hundred dollars be appropriated to remove obstructions from White Water River! "Is this river navigable—what kind of craft?" "Boats!" says one. "Flat-boats?" asks the other. "Scows?" asks a third; and White Water stagnates.

Salt River is often a theme for this legislative friskiness of a local type. The same mysterious Pascagoula River runs in the debate. It is said to be seven miles wide at the mouth, and *runs up* considerably; but not even that description could save the appropriation.

Mike Walsh once offered an amendment for $5327.39 for a light-house at Chittenango, New York. It was an internal improvement, as it was inland. He wanted human life protected on the turbid waters of the Erie Canal!

Mr. Wise once admitted that the Hudson was quite a river—a "spring branch," however, compared with the Mississippi. The Hudson would do to drink from, though it was a little brackish, but not so good as the great waters of the West!

"If you were to lift up the whole State of South Carolina and place her at the mouth of the Mississippi, the

first breaking-up of the ice would wash her off." This was said by a Missouri Senator.

Judge Douglas did not often indulge in the frivolities of debate, although he was always telling his odd stories. Once he told the Senate why the best lands in Kentucky were called barrens. It was the timber land next to the prairies. In the same debate, he asked, humorously, if it was not a Californian who planted a ten-acre patch in potatoes, and had to rent an adjoining tract to pile them up on! This did not equal Texas, where it was said that a fellow was seen sitting on one end of a sweet-potato, while he was roasting the other in the fire!

The question concerned the graduation of the price of public lands. "Barren lands" were to be defined by legislation. "It is a description of land found in North Carolina," said Mr. Yulee, of Florida. The State pride of the courtly Senator Badger was roused. He hoped that the Floridian who had traveled in the old North State did not mean to make the insinuation that North Carolina was in the same situation as Florida. "Why, sir, mine is a modest State, and does not expose her good qualities to publicity. She generally sends her travelers through her poor lands, and in the night!"

Once it was my fortune to hear that prince of humorists, General Craig, of Missouri, play a little fun by way of answering some parsimonious objections to the distribution of seeds. "I apprehend," said he, "that there is no land in the gentleman's State of North Carolina where seeds will grow." "Has the gentleman seen the State?" "Yes, sir; I have been through it. The only seeds I saw growing there were tar, pitch, and turpentine! The people there do not want these tea-plants, for they drink sassafras!"

In debating the Pacific Railroad, there was much peppery shooting as to routes. "If my friend had a friend," said General Craig, "who was about to start to heaven, he would want him to start at St. Louis, and go through Springfield and Albuquerque! He thinks the nearest route to any given point on earth, or over it, or under it, is by way of the thirty-fifth parallel, or by the ram's-horn route!"

From time immemorial—certainly from the time when it was said that no good could come out of Nazareth—the fallacy of pointing sarcasm or humor at localities has been recognized as an element in human nature and its literature.

XVI.

WIT AND IMMORALITY, IN AND OUT OF THE LEGISLATURE.

"Nimium risus pretium est, si probitatis impendio constat."—QUINTILIAN.

"A LAUGH is too dearly bought when purchased at the expense of virtue." This may be a classic platitude translated from the Latin author above quoted; but there is no didactic thought less heeded, and none which demands nicer heed.

There is an abuse of humor sometimes successful, and often resorted to by the cunning. A French critic has said that the finest oratory has been exhibited in the eulogy of the dead and the defense of the criminal. Now, all admit humor to be out of place at the obsequies of the departed, although there is a sort of grim humor in the repetitious mockery of woe known as Congressional obituary speeches. These eulogies, with but a few exceptions, fill Mrs. Malaprop's definition of an important accomplishment—"a nice derangement of epitaphs."

In still pursuing this fruitful theme of humor under its quasi-personal aspects, a general inquiry may be hazarded here. Why is it that some of the best humor is in defense of the bad? Why is the indefensible so often defended by fallacious fun? Does the devil monopolize the best jokes as well as the best music? Falstaff, when he defends his vices, lards the lean earth with unctuous hilarity. Hudibras makes a witty theme out of Puritanic

austerity, as Aristophanes made Athens laugh rather with than at the corruptions of his time. Lord Macaulay says of the Athenian comedies that there are scarcely one hundred lines of them together without some passage of which Rochester would have been ashamed. Molière, it is true, like a true man, exposed misanthropy, affectation, vice, and tyranny, and wore the sock for a virtuous purpose. Is he exceptional? Is ridicule a fair test of truth? Why have the greatest wits defended loose principles? The English comedies sparkle with indelicacy, and dance the *cancan* of indecency. Voltaire plumed himself on the superior *bienséance* of the French stage, and denounced the debaucheries of the English. Its wit may have been lively, but its sentiment was to him *sans mœurs et sans goût.*

But it is not my province to reason about the moralities of my subject. My object is to show why we laugh. And certainly we do not enjoy vice, in any portrayal of it, as vice *per se.*

One of the most exquisite pieces of rhetorical humor was once delivered by a California Senator. He defended the exaltation of intoxication with such incomparable pleasantry that many went out and imbibed! The Senate was left without a quorum. In the spring of 1870, Mr. Johnson, recently elected Lieutenant-governor of California, made a speech, almost a poem, in which the fruits of the vine were celebrated in a purple shower of wit, and where no tears but "tears of wine" were shed to enhance the luxury of nature's rich clusters and golden goblets!

A Southern Senator, giving a reason for his absence from a vote, while his political friends were all voting against secession and compromise, said that in early life he had

this advice given by an old friend: "My son, never find yourself in bad company; for if a flock of blackbirds should light upon a tree, and a pigeon should place himself among them, and a sportsman should shoot at the flock, he would be just as apt to hit the pigeon as the blackbirds." This was a *quasi* but amusing defense of obnoxious conduct.

It was a question of constructive mileage in 1853. Some took the doubtful money, and some did not. Mr. Badger, who compares so closely with Edmunds, of Vermont, in his look, manners, and wit, intimated that he took it, though it was small; and another took it, because it was larger. He did not grudge it; he was not for leveling the pay of others down, but his own up.

In a debate as to mileage in 1849, Mr. Greeley, who was uttering a philippic against the unequal system, was badgered to very agony by General Schenck, as to whether it was or was not fair to take what the law allowed. The one had an ethical, and the other a political or selfish outlook at such affairs as mileage; and their views naturally clashed like flints with fire.

A fresh illustration of the way genius may defend, or, rather, exterminate, the indefensible was the debate on the "back pay." If ridicule could have overcome the moral sense, it would have been on this topic. It afforded an opportunity for men to develop those little jets of fun which burst out of the fountain of human selfishness. The men who did not take the money of course got the worst of the debate. The shrewd outgeneraled the simple by their wit. The latter were the arrant demagogues, giving up for popular favor that which would have helped their households. Especially did the *soi-disant* virtuous members suffer who had taken back pay under previous

Congresses. A Kentucky member cries out: "Am I accused of stealing? I demand a trial by the law. How does the law read?—'Thou shalt not steal.' What is stealing?—Taking and carrying away. Nothing said about bringing it back!" An Ohio member who had been inveighing against the grab, had once had his portrait fixed as a frontispiece in a public document. How Congress laughed as one of his inculpated colleagues held him up, embalmed, among the worms of the capital, at the public expense! A Maine member argued "that if it was wrong for Congress to increase its own pay, it was equally wrong to reduce it. The rule applied both ways. If it is too high, oh, let not the reduction apply to ourselves!" In raising the salary, a Texas Senator pleaded that as they had helped the soldier, they could help themselves, on the principle of an average of good, and this was the story he told: "A mean man said to his wife, 'My dear, I admit I am a bad husband, the worst; but I have the best wife in the world, and thereby we make a pretty good average.'"

On the same bad fallacy of fun, a Senator is up, arguing lustily for the abolition of the frank. Another Senator, whose significant name is Fowler, leads a pack of Senators after this first Senator with questions like these: "Is there any thing to prevent the Senator paying his postage if he chooses?" "May he not dispense with the accursed privilege?" until the hoarse voice of Sumner tumbles into the fun, "The Senator may emancipate himself by refusing to frank and paying all his own postage." Whereupon the Senator who would make reform is put down as a charlatan. A member in 1866 offered to expel another because he did not take the extra compensation voted, while another amusingly argued that if the

salaries were reduced, the incomes of all Senators should be equalized.

There may be many reprehensible modes of influencing public conduct, when that conduct is sought to be ameliorated. It is a question of ethics, or casuistry, whether such bad means to such a good end are justifiable. It is the old question, ever recurring in human affairs. Upon the point we have not the example, but the precept of the most singular of all parliamentary orators. William Gerard Hamilton has left us his "Parliamentary Logick," but his "single speech" is unreported and lost. That "single speech," from the delivery of which came his singular fame, can only be guessed about, from the singular rules which he has left for the guidance of public debate. This gentleman was no sequestered scholar. He was not unacquainted with the actual workings of legislation. Sitting in Parliament forty years, his only display in his chosen arena was so meteoric and splendid, that he seems to have despaired of further forensic glory. He limited his exertions to observations and precepts for the instruction of others. He flourished about the middle of the eighteenth century. His "single speech" was made in 1755. He broke out—as a contemporary describes it—"like the Irish rebellion, three-score thousand strong, when nobody was aware." Grenville, Pitt, Lyttleton, Murray, and Fox were his companions in that debate; but "young Mr. Hamilton was at once perfection." Antithetic, argumentative, discursive; with spirited manner and impetuous flow, he carried the House by his vivid energy and elegance of diction. Yet this wonderful and unique speech is a mere tradition. We may conjecture as to its quality by the rules which he gives for similar performances. Would the reader know his secret?

Would he know what were the tricks of this parliamentary juggler? Would this juggler have the orator of the Commons approve certain public conduct when he censured? Yes. Would he have the model parliamentarian yield points not material, admit propositions and deny inferences, state the mischiefs of the opposite extreme? Would he have the successful rhetorician affect more exact expression, introduce something flattering to the House, suppress one thing and color another, run a vice into virtue and *vice versâ*, use fancy in molding and varying a thought, observe what had been heard with aversion and pleasure, and make happy amplifications and pauses, gradually ascending to the summit of grandeur? Yes, yes. Why should not the orator sweeten discourse with periphrasis, strengthen by conciseness, avoid surprising novelties, heap up dazzling comparisons when he could not convince, and distinguish as to words and their meanings?

Our instructor insists on one apothegm, above all. When you can not resist, then use wit, fancy, subtlety, and craft! Conceal the method you have. Evade answering an objection by raising other objections. Use tropes of music, like those of rhetoric, to slide from the close, and deceive the expectation. Perplex by subtlety, and overrule by imagination. Before you speak, consider the tone, whether high and authoritative, evasive or ludicrous. Manage to treat the ridiculous and untenable of one opponent as the argument of all opponents. Insinuate rather than assert censure. Preconsider the finest parts of your speech; and when you come to that, hesitate and appear to boggle, catch at some expression that shall fall short of your idea, and then seem to hit upon the true thing! Pretend you do not intend to speak long. Push

your opponent to extremes beyond his intention. Appear distressed at your setting out. Talk now as an old, and then as a young man; now as in office, and then as out; now as a member, and then as a judge; ridicule and panegyrize, deferentially. Separate the ridicule of your opponent from his argument, and thus belittle both. Bring on a personal altercation, and draw off thereby attention from the main point. Couch close to the auditor. Deceive by circumlocution, and not otherwise. Aggravate only at the end, and you will be remembered. Thus the "single-speech" hero made his precept; but he reserved his best thought of a parliamentary success by advising that the orator should show the reason of a thing, *ex absurdo e contrario.* He advised that, when the ludicrous turn was to be given, the orator should drop from the high notes into a low, familiar, conversational key. He knew that the *reductio ad absurdum* was the best argument for a popular assembly, and advised the parliamentarian to consider, not merely the weakness of an adversary's argument, but the absurdities of which it is productive.

So that this parliamentary phenomenon, who gives us the mysteries of iniquitous practice in rhetoric, at last arrives at the point, that to advocate the best, by bad and tricky methods, is a virtue and a success! But how few with the intention to advocate the best practice upon his ingenious prescripts? and, therefore, how many fail in their single and multiplied speeches, even when assisted by the most artful turns of debate. All will agree, however, that it is better to use bad methods for good ends, than good methods, whether humorous or otherwise, for bad ends.

XVII.

LEGISLATIVE ANECDOTE, AND ITS APPLICATION.

"A *story* in which native humor reigns,
'Tis often useful, always entertains."—COWPER.

ANOTHER species of humor consists in the narration and application of anecdote. It may seem strange that so little of that mimicry which accompanies the anecdote is used in Congress. That which is so common outside of the legislature, viz., the Irish, German, and African *patois*, is seldom used within its halls. Only once has French been appropriated to illustrate by its humorous expression. Mr. Roosevelt, of New York, almost sung to a delighted House the chorus of "The Grand Duchess." His *opéra bouffe* was intended to show the re-re-reconstruction of reconstruction; and his iteration of "remontera" with the roll of the r-r's had a peculiar effect. He intimated that this was the fourth or fifth reconstruction. It reminded him of Prince Paul. When the prime minister of his highness came to the duchess, and proposed the prince's hand in marriage, he was invited to walk upstairs; then along a corridor; then down-stairs; then along other corridors, up more stairs, along more corridors, down further stairs, along further corridors, up further stairs; or, as the French has it, "Il montera, il traversera, il descendra; alors il remontera, il retraversera, il redescendra; alors re-remontera, il re-retraversera, il re-redescendra," and so forth.

Liston and Jack Reeves played the broadest and richest humor known to the English or to any stage. Burton was a great, bluff player, but a great imitator as well. Indeed, the mimic art is rarely deliberative. Others have played humor more exquisitely than these artists; but humor when too delicate is apt to lose much of its humorous tang. It becomes something more than wit. It is Beauty and Truth. It approaches what Emerson calls integrity, the whole of thought, perfection; and the muscular irritation of laughter ceases as we approach the sacred shrine.

But why should not the humor of others be "transferable on delivery," for general delectation? All histrionic efforts in comedy would otherwise die. We have no less authority than Terentius for the reproach, that those who apply the wit of others transfer to themselves the glory of its sheen. But may not your wit receive added splendor by the performance of others who distill or elaborate it?

It may seem strange also that a body of men so accustomed to use mimicry and anecdote, as tricks of rhetoric on the stump, should not fully appreciate their use in Congress. But such is the fact. The galleries may, and sometimes do appreciate such humors. Whether because the story is too slow and zigzag a way of reaching the object, or whether the joke is generally stale—whatever it is, anecdote is too diffuse and vapid; and if pungent, it is apt to degenerate into the coarse acidity of vulgarism. The mummy jokes embalmed for ages are apt to re-appear, not to blush themselves with new health, but to make others blush for the poverty of the present, compared with the richness of the past. Stories are almost as much out of place in Congress as Shakspeare's sea-coasts

were in Bohemia or his lions in Ardennes. Still, they are not infrequently used, whatever may be their effect. The Senate and House seem equally impatient and inappreciative of anecdote. General Logan arises and tells the old story of the man who bragged that he was one of the minister's converts. The minister rejoins, "I should think so, for it don't seem as if the Lord was in it." Does the joke tell? It hardly evokes a simper or cachinnation. But once I saw General Houston quit his whittling of cedar sticks in the old Senate-chamber to plague General Cass. He did it by relating the story from Irving of a fight between two tortoises on shipboard. The fight consisted in blowing at each other, standing on their hind-legs. It was intended to illustrate diplomatic logomachy. Did it win applause? Palpably; but it won by the grotesque manner of the narrator and the pithy pertinency of the story. General Hawley, with the soul of wit, to show the horrors of war briefly related for a purpose how he once asked one of his subordinates in his first battle, "Colonel, how did you like it?" "Well," said he, "I am satisfied; but when I saw my men going down all around me, I thought, 'Can't this confounded thing be compromised?'" These instances are, however, exceptional, and depend for their success on their pointed application and concise expression. The genius here is not that of the memory, nor in the recitation, but in the adaptation.

General Nye was always happy in a short story. The question of rebellion and amnesty is up. "Guilty or not guilty, is it you ask me?" said an Irishman. "How can I tell till I hear the evidence?" The story is somewhat musty. The point was a good deal in the Corwinian manner of its relation. How well, not to say how often,

he told the story of the man who mauled the dead badger, for the purpose, as he said, of convincing the badger that there was punishment after death! Not less brief, as an illustration of the "uncertainty of the law," was that of the young attorney who had thrown up the profession and gone to speculating in lottery tickets.

Mr. W. R. Roberts, of New York, neatly touched up the peaceful character and doubtful existence of the Kuklux by calling attention to the fact that nowhere in either party from the South or elsewhere were there evidences of violence. An Irishman in a strange town stood looking at a vessel. He was accosted, "Where are you from, Paddy?" "Begorra, sir, I'm from anywhere but here, and I'll soon be from here too, sir." *Argal*, where were the K. K.'s?

Illustrating the monopoly of ferries over the Western streams in a remote Territory, an exaggerative Delegate said that he had known two horses taken to pay the toll for one.

General Nye, commenting upon the binding force of instructions to a committee, told the story of an Irishman in one of our big cities. The dogs took after him, and he tried to stone them. He found the bowlders fast in the street, and he said, "It was a very pretty country for liberty, to turn the dogs loose and tie the stones down." This Senator seemed more than any one to make the Senate redolent of the stump. He had carried his hustings from New York to Nevada, and thence returned it into Congress. He could not strike an inconsistent Senator without telling the story of the Dutch artist representing the Scriptural scene of Abraham offering up Isaac. He gave, by a cruel anachronism, a pistol to Abraham instead of a knife. "How, then, could the angel intervene?" He

finally poised the angel on wings, with a cup of water to wet the powder in the pan! Thus was Isaac saved.

Classic wit is rare in Congress. The εὐφήμει of the Greeks and the *favete linguis* of the Romans evince the care with which they endeavored to repress the utterance of ill fortune. John Stuart Mill, in his "Fallacies of Simple Inspection," shows that this resulted from a superstitious horror. The Romans avoided mentioning the possible death of those living for fear of the catastrophe. They scarcely ever said *damnum*. The Anglo-Saxon race is not so fastidious with respect to such bad words. Instead of *mortuus est*, the Romans said *vixit*. They only hinted at, never spoke openly of, adverse fortune. They simply said, "Be the event fortunate or *otherwise*." Was there ever a closer following of the classic model, without the superstitious fallacy, than is this sudden and spontaneous adaptation to a chance occasion by Governor Anthony?

"This bill," said he, "is a child of mine, and I feel toward it as the man did in regard to his sick wife—he wished she would get well, or *something*."

Mr. Davis, of Kentucky, turned the *ad absurdum* on Senator Anthony by a Celtic story. "The Senator says that this patent dock will save itself twice. A man with a patent stove met an Irishman. As an inducement to try it, he stated that it would save half the coal in twelve months. 'Ah, be jabers, I'll buy two of them, and save the whole of the fuel!'"

John P. Hale once told this story of patronage. "A lady appealed to me to assist her, as she had a Revolutionary claim; she said that she would go out into the street and get some boy, and bring him in and have him appointed a page, and she would take half his pay for her ancestor's services in the Revolution." This was follow-

ed by "violent convulsions of the face and sides, and obstreperous roarings of the throat." Why did the Senate laugh? What is nobler than Revolutionary service —what more exalting than patriotism? The solution is found in the transcendental remark that when the patriotic enthusiasm ends in the intelligible maxims of trade —so much for so much—the intellect feels the half man, and the whole man laughs.

The utter abandonment to the humors of the Senate apparent in all John P. Hale's oratory is not to be taken in derogation of his abundant information and practical sagacity. But he seldom refrained from making his points, when they occurred, because they were jocose. He represented what was at one time a small body of Abolitionists. The organization was called "unhealthy," and he was left off the committees in consequence; but he made up for this legislative proscription by an incessant and laughing current of aggressive remark. This was always received with good temper. A meeting was held in the Buchanan days, which Senator Bigler called "semi-official." Mr. Hale had heard of semi-barbarous, semi-savage, semi-civilized, semi-annual, and semi-weekly; but the "semi-official" troubled him. Was it official? Unofficial? Neither. It was semi-official! And then he told the story of the man who called at a bank to find out if a bank-note was genuine. "Well, what did the cashier say?—counterfeit?" "No." "Genuine?" "No. He said it was about middling—semi-genuine! So," continued Mr. Hale, "in Jackson's day they had a kitchen cabinet, as well as a regular one. The kitchen cabinet met in the parlor: it was semi-official."

Mr. Stephens, of Georgia, once referred to the lawyer who began speaking after the decision. The judge told him that he did not allow arguing after the case was de-

cided. The lawyer said, "Sir, I was not arguing the case: I was only cursing the decision." This was pointed at a member who had re-opened a debate.

Again, said one, speaking against the Pacific Railroad Bill: "It reminds me of the jockey who went to buy a horse. Five thousand dollars was asked. "I have thirteen reasons against it. First, I have not got the money." "Just stop! the first reason is enough!"

"There was a colloquy between two friends as to the certainty of the Millennium," said Etheridge, referring to the apparent harmony between parties as to certain matters then pending. "The lion will lie down with the lamb." Both agreed to that. But one consoled himself in making the admission by saying that he had the satisfaction of believing that the lamb would be inside of the lion!

One of the most effective anecdotes ever related in any body was that from General Clarke, of Missouri, during the struggle to elect a Speaker in 1860. John Sherman was the candidate for nearly two months. At last he withdrew; and hence the anecdote. A hunter went out turkey-hunting. He found a turkey roosting on one of the highest trees of the forest. He fired; the turkey fell, and he started for the purpose of catching him; but the turkey got up and ran off with a broken wing. The hunter pursued till he got tired, and ceased with the exclamation, "There's one consolation: you will have to roost lower the rest of your life!" But the winged bird of 1860 is now a Senator! Such are the vaticinations of politics!

These memorabilia of anecdote do not pretend to rise to the dignity of history, yet the very tales and stories collated are eccentric indexes to the peculiar rhetoric and manners of our people, as well as to the public records and materials of history.

XVIII.

LEGISLATIVE ANECDOTE—*CONTINUED.*

"It is a true shaft of Apollo, and traverses the universe, and, unless it encounter a mystic or a dumpish soul, goes everywhere, heralded and harbingered by smiles and greetings. Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can make any stand against good wit. It is like ice, on which no beauty of form, no majesty of carriage, can plead any immunity: they must walk gingerly, according to the laws of ice, or down they must go, dignity and all."—EMERSON'S *Letters and Social Aims*, 1876.

"Ride si sapis."—MARTIAL.

THE utilities of anecdote in legislation are not at once manifest. Although we have the example of the Great Teacher in the use of the parable, yet he used that form of speech before the uneducated people; and are we not told that "the common people heard him gladly?" Upon the cultivated and disciplined intellect—with which abstract thought and its habitudes are familiar—there is no need to turn the various lights of illustration. It is gilding refined gold and adding other hues to the violet. To such a mind, anecdote and parable are excess.

Besides, recitation and acting, in anecdote, are not evidences of originality. Are they, therefore, proof of inferior ability? This is a question which Emerson, in his last volume, has discussed with the inconsistency and interest of an original theme—all sparkling with quotation and anecdote. While he holds that there is an immense content in suction or quotation—whether in insects or

mammals, in parasites or men—he does not dignify the act, except when the assimilating power is proportionate to the spontaneous power. There are no originals. The child is a derivative; the mother is—quite original. But are the originals all original? Ranging through the vast domain of human literature and ascending to the archangels, he discovers that every thing is foregone. But does he disparage borrowing? No. It comes, he says, of stoutness and magnanimity. Perhaps he had in his mind the origin of the milky way; for does not the myth say that its stellar splendor was the result of too strong an effort of suction by the infant Hercules? He would justify the uses of anecdote, although it is one form of eavesdropping. He commends quotation, for human instruction. Certainly, if he were compelled to service in a legislature, he would permit the old Cremona to play, that the dull hours might dance with flying feet. When the orator, by apt allusion and analogous logic—such as are often found in anecdote—fills with his own voice and humor the dull and empty time, would he be too critical about the sources from whence come the hilarities? It is only when a story is told, which the narrator does not appropriate as his own, that Mr. Emerson would disown the narrator. When, therefore, there is placed at the head of this chapter one of his own suggestive paragraphs; and then, when we read in his essay that, in "opening a new book, he is quick to discover, from the unguarded devotion with which the writer gives his motto or his text, all we have to expect from him," I am compelled either to appeal to a lower order of intelligence for my readers, or to ask the philosopher to regard anecdote, quotation, or "suction" as the main business of legislative life, and the sweetness and ardor of the unoriginal act as the only

excuse for any impatience at its interruption, and for its want of originality. The purport of all which is, that only when the orator steals boldly, and uses as his own, the property of another, has he the divine gift of the ever instant life! It is the composition of the new out of the old decomposition. As some one might suspect Congress of unrighteous appropriation or unpleasant decomposition, some instances may be adduced of legislative suction under transcendental conditions.

"I do not know what to do next," said a discomfited Senator. "I feel like the sailor at a puppet-show, who, when a keg of powder exploded in some part of the building, and blew him out of the window, cried out, 'I wonder what the man will do next!'"

The story of the fellow caught shooting tame hogs has been more than once used to express a moral. He was finally caught. What was his excuse? "I'll shoot all your hogs that come round biting me this way!" Sometimes this has been applied to the less dangerous animal, the sheep; but the moral humor is the same.

A Senator illustrates the braggadocio indulged in as to a certain harbor, for which appropriations were asked, by the story of the man who said he had the fastest horse in the world, but he was afraid to try him!

During the Mexican debate, Mr. Jones, of Tennessee, related this story. The application is clear: "Well, now, if there were no injuries committed, no insults offered, and no robberies and spoliations upon our citizens, what was it that Mexico confessed? Why, she promised reparation for nothing; and, therefore, she had fully paid the debt. This was like the compensation the Indian made to the trader to whom he was indebted. An Indian called upon a trader. 'Sir,' said the trader, 'I have a note

of yours.' 'I know it,' said the Indian, 'but I have not the money to pay with now, and I wish you to wait a little. I'll pay it by-and-by.' 'Very well,' said the trader, 'an acknowledgment of the debt is equal to half payment.' He called the second time, when a similar colloquy took place; and on calling the third time, the Indian said to the trader, 'I owe you nothing. I have paid you all that I owe you.' 'How so?' said the trader. 'Did you not acknowledge the debt the first and second times, and have you paid me any thing since that?' 'True,' rejoined the Indian, 'but the first time you said an acknowledgment was half pay, and surely the next acknowledgment was the other half!'" This was the reparation we had received from Mexico, and the joke helped to make war.

A rich widow had a pension claim. It was opposed by Mr. Clay, of Alabama. She had a house, she said; but it cost so very much to keep it up. Not unlike the Spanish beggar on horseback. When rebuked for begging on horseback, he whined, "Oh, señor! the greater cause to beg, for have I not my horse to feed as well as myself?"

The Whig party was supposed to be broken in 1842. It was likened to the man who wished to sell his horse. A by-stander asked if the horse was not spavined? "Spavined! I don't know what that is; but if the horse is any better for being spavined, then he is spavined!"

A North Carolinian, to illustrate the spasmodic and irrational character of a certain debate on both sides, narrated the story of a witness, who was asked as to an old lady: "I know her general character. It is generally believed in the neighborhood that she is a woman unworthy of common sense and guilty of fits."

My predecessor, Dr. Olds, told an admirable story

about one "Live Forever Jones," of Kentucky. He was a candidate, and brought an essay to a friend for advice. The friend read it through; said it was well written; "but he could see no point in it." "Well, sir, that's just what I want. If I make a point, they get me on it."

A Tennessee member once gave an idea of the elasticity of politicians by the auctioneer's praise of the suspenders which he was selling: that they were short enough for any boy, and long enough for any man!

Senator M'Creery, who is unctuous with humor, once related that a lawyer in his State, while admitting the foreknowledge of God as a general proposition, did not believe that He could tell in advance how a county court of Kentucky would decide a case.

Mr. Evarts, on the impeachment trial, told a pertinent story of the old lady who said if you took away her "total depravity, you took away her religion."

General Butler related a historical narrative at the expense of the Indian Penn treaty. It provided for as much land as a man could walk over in a day. A Quaker was found who walked four hundred miles in one day!

"As to Andrew Johnson, I feel," said Judge Lawrence, of Ohio, "as a man once said of Jackson, 'I don't wish General Jackson any harm, but I shouldn't care if the Almighty took a fancy to him.'"

"And you say that I can not, sir, as a justice of the peace, take jurisdiction of slander cases?" "I said so," said Senator Baker. "Now, sir, I know I can; for I have done it!" Thus did the gallant Oregon soldier-senator illustrate the difference between theory and practice.

"He was a po'orful preacher. He has pounded three

pulpits to pieces and danged the life out of five Bibles." This was one of Wigfall's points to show the hot secession debate.

General Butler apologized for a long speech by the remark of Charles II. when dying. He knew that he was an unconscionable long time dying, and apologized therefor to his friends.

To make clear some of the beauties and virtues of reconstruction, Senator Dixon repeated Dr. Johnson's narrative to Boswell: "I was passing a fish-monger's stall, and I saw him skinning an eel alive; and he was cursing the eel because it would not lie still." The disquieted and uneasy South, and the debate on its outlawry, were the points aimed at by the elegant and lamented Senator from Connecticut.

A Missourian desired to help a special bill, while he would not give up a general one, for the benefit of his State. He said: "It reminds me, sir, of the case of a profligate man who went to a respectable judge, and said, 'The laws of society are not properly constructed.' 'What is the matter with them?' said the judge. 'Why, you are rich, and I am poor, and I think we ought to divide.' 'If I did divide with you,' said the judge, 'at the end of six months you will have spent all your money. What will you do then?' 'Why, divide again, of course.'" A thousand volumes on Agrarianism or Communism could not better express the organic law of society.

F. R. S. was translated by De Quincey into Fellows Remarkably Stupid; for were not the Fellows of the Royal Society solemn men, and dull in conversation? And so, ridiculing the ostentatious mode of signing names during the war, General Schenck told this of a foppish Deputy

Quarter Master General, who was in the habit of writing after his name "D. Q. M. G." Some wag wrote after it, "D—d Quick Made General."

An Ohio member once touchingly related how an old bridge on the Miami had been carried off in a freshet. Bill Beckett was there, looking on. As he saw the bridge, with fifty years of association from rosy youth to gray age, tears stood in his eyes. "Ah! no wonder," said a friend of Bill's; "he was its biggest stockholder." This was intended to show the difference between sentiment and selfishness.

To give pith to the eulogy of an elderly statesman, this was narrated of an old dog: "This dog, you see, is lame, blind, and deaf, yet the most valuable of all in my pack." "How is that?" "His education was good, and his sense is unimpaired. We only take him out to catch the scent and put the puppies on the track, and then return him to the kennel. He never bit the hand that fed him, or barked on a false trail."

One member likens an appropriation for the test of an engine to the Irishman's rabbit, which cost more to cook it than it was worth.

One of Mr. Lincoln's stories was once used to display the ponderous points made by an antagonist. One of the President's neighbors had some heavy butts of logs on his land. "They were too infernal heavy to roll, too darned soggy to burn, and too tarnal tough to split; so he just plowed all around them."

That was a good story of the man who had a case against another man, and, looking into the statute, found that he could sue before *any* justice of the peace. As he was himself a justice, he brought it before himself, and gave judgment for the defendant, and appealed. The

higher court affirmed the judgment below. This is one of Judge Poland's points about a Connecticut justice.

It is the better way, in a deliberative body, to give a hint of the story rather than elaborate it. "The gentleman need not begin to weep till the oven begins to heat," was a familiar and pleasant allusion of Mr. Scofield, of Pennsylvania; or, rather, a reference to the sad illusion of the girl and her fanciful and crispy infant.

Senator Cowan once told, with shrewd application, the story of the Irishman who, to improve the breed of cattle, imported a yoke of oxen.

"Are you not conscious that you are laboring under a prejudice against that man?" was one of Judge Collamer's happy narratives. "Yes, sir, I think it likely. I have detected him stealing two or three times."

Another of the judge's well-applied though aged stories is that of the Irish proposition: first, that a new jail should be built out of the materials of the old one; and, second, that the old one should be kept good for prisoners till the new one was finished.

Apropos of this sort of narrative for rhetorical effect, it is a marvel that spicy literary allusions are so seldom used for illustration in Congress. They are quite infrequent, more so than in Parliament. Few references are made to Dickens, and rarely is there a hint of Cervantes. Judge Kelley once called Bunsby to his side to help him answer the question whether a protective duty is a tax or a bounty: "The bearings of this observation lays in the application on it."

Governor Washburne, of Maine, once referred to Dickens in a Nebraska contested election, where Samuel Weller and Oliver Twist were recorded as voters. "I have known several persons whose surnames were Weller and

Twist. Is it possible that, among all the Wellers and Twists, there are no Samuels or Olivers? If so, why not in Nebraska, as well as anywhere else? There was a Weller in the Senate, and Twists are everywhere. The gentleman himself is getting in a *twist*."

Mr. Clay used to quote from "Gil Blas." In answering a free trader, he made a picture of the hero going to Dr. Sangrado. "All our patients are dying with this warm water and blood-letting. Let us change our system!" "Change!" Do you not know that I have written a book, and must preserve my consistency? Sooner than change, or write another book to prove it false, let nobles, gentlemen, bourgeois, men, women, children, and all go—!" The Senate filled the profane and suggestive gap. Senatorial waistbands split; dignified buttons burst off; and the whole body, like Wendell Holmes's servant, tumbled in a fit of fun!

XIX.

LEGISLATIVE RETORT AND REPARTEE.

"In Aristotle, such persons are termed ἐπιδέξιοι (dexterous men), and ἔντοποι (men of facile or versatile manners), who can easily turn themselves to all things, or all things to themselves."—DR. BARROW.

UNDER this head and its motto may be considered those natural and ready responses which are condensed by the fire and hurry of debate. The quick fusillade of fun, the sudden turn of expression—these are repartees. They are unstudied and innocent. But the keenly barbed shafts that strike the white may not be classed strictly with repartee. They are retorts and sarcasms. They are the *diablerie* of wit, not the benevolences of humor. They are the electric spark rather of the individual than of the whole body. It is Voltaire in the tribune, or Sheridan in the play; for the barb too often wounds, poisons, and rankles. A member, once reproached of defeat in his State, says, copying unconsciously an old *mot*, "My State disgraces me, but you disgrace your State."

A female-suffrage orator in Connecticut was tauntingly asked, "Would you make a man of your wife?" He replied, "I hope your wife will make a man of you."

It has been abundantly shown in previous chapters, that the best element of the comic is in the form, face, and manners of those who are vain of these appearances. Such personalities, as Emerson has shown, were the butt

of those jokes which are so copiously recounted in the French *Mémoires*. A tall Republican lady is called "Le Grenadier Tricolore;" and a thin lady, in compliment to her skeleton, is named the "Venus of the Père-la-chaise." But a better dash of personal epigram was that of the son of a rich tobacconist, who was in the English army. For some time his fellow-officers were constant in their jokes. One of them was rude enough to ask him what his father was; and when he said, "A tobacconist," replied, "Then I wonder he did not make you one." The young cornet, on this, asked what the officer's father was; and when he said, "A gentleman," replied in turn, "Then I wonder he did not make you one."

There was a dark New England day in 1780. A lady sent to a divine to know the cause. He returned, for answer, "I am as much in the dark as you are." The lady was totally eclipsed; but there was no lightning in that cloud. It was not retort.

But who was there in America ever answered the quick call for retort like George D. Prentice? He is the initial man in such wit. "Villainy is afoot," says Governor Medary, a rival editor. "Has the editor lost his horse?" retorts Prentice. "Have I changed?" says another. "That depends on whether you were ever honest." Another remarks that Mr. Clay is behind the age. "Then the age must be tail foremost." "What would you do, madam, if you were a gentleman?" "Sir, what would you do if you were one?"

These are specimens of the spicy answer, of which examples are neither dull nor rare in Congress. Once, when the Calhoun and Van Buren rivalry existed, and Calhoun was presiding in the Senate, with Jackson at the White House, General Noble, in alluding to those re-

lations, said, "I tell you, Mr. President, the little magician will spoil your dish with the old hero; he is as cunning as a serpent, and as harmless as a dove." "The Senator will confine himself to the subject." "Which subject?" "The one before the Senate." "I am trying to do so. I see but one subject before the Senate; the other is at the White House." "The Senator will take his seat." "As I was saying, the little magician—" "The Senator was directed to take his seat." "So I did, but the Chair did not expect me to sit there the balance of the session."

The question of excuse for absence was before the Senate. The proviso was, "Unless such absence of Senators is occasioned by their sickness, and that of wife or child." But said Senator Badger, "What of a Senator like General Shields, who has neither wife nor child—a single man, and yet not a single being in the world by whose indisposition he can profit?" This was the pure gold, struck out of the crystal, and melted into sterling wit.

Senator Simmons had a passage at arms about arms with Jefferson Davis. "I hope," said General Davis, "the Senator did not understand me as arraigning his common sense?" Mr. SIMMONS. "I did. I know of no other who uses the article here, and to whom the remark could apply."

"My colleague has been at his usual work of fighting windmills," said a member from Massachusetts. "I was fighting my colleague," replied the ready Eli Thayer.

"No gentleman has a right to insult another," said Judge Collamer. "Grant it," said Jefferson Davis. "And he is no gentleman if he does," retorted the Judge.

When the tariff was pending, Mr. Vallandigham, who

was watching the protectionists of Pennsylvania in full chorus on the floor, cried out, "Is not every furnace in Pennsylvania in full blast?"

"I do not know that it is a reproach to the military gentleman from Iowa that he is not a lawyer." "I must regard it so," replied General Curtis, "as I had the honor of graduating at the law, and practicing some." This was subtle and neat.

Governor Cleveland made one of the best retorts of the sprightly Congress of 1852. At that time parties were together and good-natured. The Free-soil element was peeping from the Orient, but was not then the rosy-fingered aurora. While a great number of statesmen were giving in their adhesion to the antislavery movement, Governor Cleveland lifted up his splendid form and voice, and said, all too bitterly, "If slave buyers and sellers go to hell, it seems to me there should be some other word coined to describe the place where Northern men, who uphold the practice, and especially professed ministers of the Gospel, should go—" Mr. VENABLE (interrupting). "Will the gentleman tell me what has been done with the money you made in Connecticut by selling negroes kidnaped from Africa?" Mr. CLEVELAND. "If we made any, we invested it in common-school education, to enable us to send our boys of thirteen to instruct your men of twenty-five in North Carolina." This was the bitter retort, all too bitter for relish.

"Why suspend this work on the Treasury building?" It was answered: "There are quicksands under it." "Ah!" said another, "there are quicksands under the administration."

"You may vote us down, but we shall live to fight another day." To which Judge Douglas quoted the old

lines, "He who fights and runs away—" Whereupon ex-President Wilson made the best retort of his long career, "We shall not run away to live; we shall live to run." It was piquant and prophetic.

"What's before the House—does the gentleman know?" says the irate Speaker. "I am," said the member. The House and Speaker laugh.

"I move to extend a railing outside of the seats." "How far outside?" asks the demure Dawes.

"Shall we not adjourn from Friday till Monday?" said Senator Hamilton. "No, no," said several Senators. Mr. HAMILTON. "Gentlemen say 'No, no;' I say 'Yes, yes.'" Mr. EDMUNDS. "But you can not vote twice."

A member is urging the widening of the bronze doorway, so as to make more commodious the promenade from the House to the Senate. "Does the gentleman," said Mr. Dawes, who may then have been cultivating an enlarged bronze for the Upper House, "find his progress to the Senate obstructed by the narrowness of the way?"

"What proportion of sugar is added to high wine when it becomes rectified?" Mr. HAMLIN. "I am no chemist. I do not drink."

"There will be some *swearing* about this legislation not set down in the bill," said a member, as to the repeal of the iron-clad oath.

Once a question was facetiously raised on the Tax Bill by Judge Holman. "Do tools and instruments mean the books of lawyers?" The repartee was: "The words exempt implements in actual use, which lawyers' books ordinarily are not."

"I would like to know," a member asked of the Utah Delegate, "whether men do not occasionally disappear

there?" "I suppose they do. Do they not disappear *everywhere?*" asked the witty Delegate.

"Has this bill been based on the supposition that the franking will be or will not be abolished?" is fiercely asked. Defiantly it is answered, "It has." Laughter.

"Who are the men who own bonds and swear they don't?" was asked of General Butler. "Oh, go and count the stars in the sky and the sands on the sea-shore, and you can get at the who!"

Mr. Dawes once suggested a monument to Governor Swan's memory for certain reforms he had projected. Governor Swan, with his usual *savoir faire*, begged him not to hurry the monument.

A Pennsylvanian was opposing an appropriation for the Ohio River. Said Mr. Stevenson, of Ohio, "It is a public work." "But," responded Mr. Dickey, "the gentleman thinks the country begins and ends on the Ohio River." "Why, sir," said Stevenson, "it rises in Pennsylvania." Mr. DICKEY. "The only good thing about it."

"Will that cut off debate on the merits?" said a member to the Speaker. "No; nor on its demerits," said Mr. Blaine.

"What does the Senator want?" was asked. "To put a head on this bill?" "Then we are working at the wrong end," said Senator Hamlin.

They were talking of the system of compulsory pilotage. It is a State system. "They have to be boarded," said one. "They board the vessel and the vessel boards them," said General Garfield. "I put four pilots in irons for refusing to pilot Farragut," said General Butler. "Ah, that *was* compulsory pilotage," said Mr. Potter.

A member anxious to take up the tariff, in which the duty on coffee was involved, said, "There is a cry of ago-

ny from the coffee interest." "Then it needs settling," said a Senator. "On what *grounds?*" said another.

A member asks to insert "rock" before "salt" in the tariff. He fails: "You split on that rock," says a member.

"My colleague," said General Banks, "has deceived me again; he would deceive the very elect." "Of course," said Mr. Dawes, to the defeated colleague, "that does not include you."

In discussing about improvements in Washington, Mr. Cameron said: "Talk about parks and lungs. The city is all lungs." "So it appears *here*," said Edmunds, with a chuckle.

"Sir," said a Southern member, "sal soda enters into the composition of soap; and soap, sir, is used by every man, woman, and child in the country." "Or ought to be," said the jocose Job Stevenson, of Ohio, and the House became lachrymose with laughing.

A member intimated that Mr. Sumner, after his displacement from the Committee of Foreign Affairs, was politically dead. "If he is dead," said Mr. George F. Hoar, of Massachusetts—more full of State than of party pride—"then the corpse buried the undertaker." This passed for ready repartee, for Sumner was quite alive then.

Ohio desires a bridge elevated, as it is only forty feet high. "The river is a gorge, and rises sixty feet from low to high water," argues Senator Sherman. "Then," said some one, "the fault is in the river and not the bridge." Why did not some practical legislator move an amendment to lower the river?

Speaking on a general appropriation bill, "I hope," said a Senator, "that the removal of the capital will not

be debated on this bill." "Why not?" said Edmunds; "has not every other question been debated?"

The Indian service is before the Senate, and the local Christian agencies. "I have met no Christians in Nevada," said Oregon. "You did not associate with our best people," said Nevada.

"The gentleman is throwing sand, not dust, in the eyes of the people." "Not sand, but shot." Mr. Speaker Blaine always clicked a hair-trigger.

"Will the gentleman report a harmonious bill on whisky?" "The bill," said Schenck, "will be harmonious; but I can not say that for the House when they hear it."

There is a canny sort of fun in Cameron's homely thrusts. Judge Thurman was interested in a debate. Cameron, who wanted an executive session, suddenly interrupts. The polite and irate Ohioan is a thousand times obliged to the Senator for interrupting him in the middle of a sentence. CAMERON. "It will give the Senator more time to reflect on the rest of it." The secret session is ordered, with genial temper.

"If the Senator is firing at the flock, it is a safe way of firing," said Casserly. "One bird is hit, at any rate," rejoined Edmunds.

The navy is anchored in Congressional waters. "What the Senator says shows that he is a thorough seaman." "Or a good deal at sea," responded Edmunds.

"It is presumed that we have a quorum, as we have done business." "Ah, but will presumption overcome a record?" asked the lawyer and Senator Howe.

"The Senator says that neither war nor secession can take a State out of the Union." This was from Senator Patterson to Senator Hendricks. "Suppose," he pursued, "all the male voting population of South Carolina

were to die, where would the Government be?" Mr. HENDRICKS. "That, sir, is rather an exhaustive question."

"Perhaps the Senator attributes the coming of the locusts to the same faithlessness as the collection of the whisky tax, eh?" "There is certainly a strong analogy." This was an unexpected acquiescence from Garrett Davis.

"The gentleman is mistaken," said Mr. Dawes; "I do not allude to any irregularity. These bad contracts seem to occur very *regularly*."

"Is it in order to charge the House with howling?" Mr. SPEAKER. "It is consistent with the fact, but is not in order."

A man was convicted for counterfeiting Confederate currency by one of the military courts. "A man so foolish," thought Thaddeus Stevens, "ought to be convicted and punished too." It was answered to this, "If all fools are to be judged by military courts, they have a wide jurisdiction." This legal repartee was on the grand debate for personal liberty, in 1865, by Winter Davis, of Maryland.

After several interruptions from Senator Edmunds, which Senator Casserly took good-humoredly, finally Casserly turned upon Edmunds, and said, "Will my friend permit me to ask him a question?" "Certainly." "Then," said Casserly, "I ask my friend, why not allow me to go on?" Mr. EDMUNDS. "Yes, or go off." But the Celtic race won; and Edmunds determined to pursue the advice of Paul to Timothy, "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes."

Hickman, of Pennsylvania, called Vallandigham, of Ohio, severely to account for having a rebel camp named

after him in Kentucky, when Vallandigham turned sharply, and said, "Is there not a town in Kentucky by the name of Hickman?" The effect was electrically humorous.

"Were one to rise from the dead, would it convince the gentleman?" "Well," said Mr. Stiles, of Pennsylvania, "I would as soon take it from a dead man as from my colleague."

"Suppose," said Senator Carpenter, beginning elaborately, "two men should sit down right here to play a game of chess, and—" Senator HOWE (interposing). "I suppose it would be wrong." Carpenter was posed.

"There's nothing in the question disagreeable." "Ah! then it's the *answer* you object to!"

"Will the gentleman allow me a moment?" "I yield every thing to you but—time," said Butler.

"I would not go on with the bill retaliating upon rebel prisoners," said Mr. Sumner. "You would," answered gruff Ben Wade, "if you were in prison."

"We do not want any more assurance to that effect from the other side." "You have enough assurance already," said that other side.

"A case of this kind came up last year." "Oh, last year is played out." This lacked refinement. It smacked of the stump, but it was effective for a laugh.

"Has any committee of this House the paternity of this bill?" The SPEAKER. "The chair thinks not." "Then, Mr. Speaker, it is an orphan," said Pomeroy, of New York. But the House shed every thing but tears over the orphaned bill.

John P. Hale once made a retort that filled the galleries with laughter by quoting ironically a text from Second Samuel, on Judge Douglas: "Absalom said, more-

over, Oh, that I were made *judge* in the land!" He was equally happy on Wigfall, who had insisted on secession and that Texas was out. He called him the Senator of the *late* State of Texas. When Wigfall protested, he called him the late Senator from Texas.

It was a railroad grant. "Where is all this to lead?" exclaimed Washburne. "To the Pacific coast," said Garfield. "To the bottom of the treasury rather," was the prompt rejoinder.

"They may use any power to stop the cholera," said Chandler. "What! martial law? I would rather have the cholera," said Governor Anthony.

"This is whipping the devil round the stump," said a member. "No matter, if you can only hit him," said Lynch, of Maine.

"If the Senate table my amendment, they would lay the Ten Commandments on the table," said a Senator. "That is where they ought to be," said Edmunds, "so that we could consult them all the time."

General Schenck was pressing a revenue bill. Mr. Wood was criticising it. The latter thought some provisions ought to be inserted to insure common sense and consistent decisions by the executive officers. General Schenck replied that the committee had left that to the Almighty and to the President who selects the officer. Mr. Wood. "We would prefer to take our chances with the Almighty." This would be a gem of purest ray, were it not overspiced with the prevailing irreverence.

Judge Drake was arguing on the Southern Pacific Railroad. "The building of roads South on a uniform five-foot gauge was a part of the scheme of rebellion. It was to prevent Northern cars from going on Southern roads." "What!" exclaims Carpenter, "does the Senator

think that there is more probability that a gauge of five feet will commit treason than one of four and a half?"

These illustrations may not adequately give the essence of this frequent and pungent repartee and retort; but they confirm an epigram as old as the Latin of Martial, that a quick wit is found in sudden chances.

"O quantum est subitis casibus ingenium!"

There is no forum where the happy first thought and the seizure of the sudden chance are so readily appreciated as in Congress.

XX.

SUGGESTIVE AND EVASIVE HUMORS OF LEGISLATION.

"Who mix'd reason with pleasure, and wisdom with mirth."
GOLDSMITH.

THERE is a certain kind of wit or humor, too evanescent and exquisite for superficial, prompt, and general apprehension. Large assemblies do not quickly catch it. If Addison had spoken in Parliament what he makes Roger de Coverley say in the *Spectator*—that he would have given her (his mistress, or his country) a coal-pit to keep her in clean linen, and that her finger should have sparkled with a hundred of his richest acres, the heavy yeomanry of the Commons would have looked at him in daft amazement. There is too much hidden in such a recondite fancy for the ordinary mind. Its very prepensive prettiness and precariousness prevent any sting or stimulus. Yet how suggestive is such wit! For example, in a legislative way:

"The swamp lands," said Senator Morrill, "require an artesian well to find the water." It was a dexterous hit at the fraudulent mode of conveying the best lands to the States under the Federal donation.

On the question of artesian wells in the Territories a piquant discussion arose. A gentleman proposed to allow distilleries in the same district to modify the water. Besides, it was hinted that the legislation was unusual, as the West was unaccustomed to water.

"Am I not in order?" it is asked. "Not at this time of night."

"This bill" (for a whisky tax) "will not hold water." It was a humorous plea for a better bill.

That, too, was quite a suggestive point, and one which members caught in advance, when a member described the friends from home, who came to Washington for office. They stay two, three, or six months, waiting till they have spent all their money. Then — what next? [A laugh.] They call on a representative of the people. [A general laugh.] What would such a point be without the hilarious and suggestive parenthesis?

The wit of Thaddeus Stevens had this quality. It hinted, perhaps, more than he meant. Unlike his wit was that of the Addisonian method; or that of Webster and Corwin, which was jeweled in the hilt, and never carried blood away on its blade. Not so with the suggestive wit of Thaddeus Stevens. His retorts riled; his quiet question quenched his opponent. It is said that a needle under the microscope will show ragged edges. Doubtless if the microscope were magnified sufficiently, the needle-point, so smooth and acute to the eye, would show jagged crags, Alpine peaks, and abysmal gorges; but Nature is infinite in her exquisite craft. The sting of a bee is as smoothly keen under the microscope as the needle is to the naked eye. This was the sting of Thaddeus Stevens. His was the sting of the honey-bee, and sometimes that of the wasp or adder; for though he had much gentleness in his nature, he was not careful of consequences. Or, to change the figure, the nest of this Parliamentary falcon was lined with softness; the thorns (to draw from a picture of Wordsworth) keeping guard outward, and only wounding the aggressor. Thaddeus

Stevens was a strange compound of the sunbeam and the lightning.

"Who will take me up in their strong arms when you two mighty men are gone?" said he to the two officers who carried him in his chair across the Capitol grounds. This was nectarine fun. "Ah, John," said he to his friend Hickman, as he was dying, "it is not my appearance, but my disappearance, that troubles me." This, too, is a spiced dainty. But when he said to a troublesome member, who was ever uncertain as to his course and vote, and who was asking liberty to pair, "I do not object to your pair, but pair with yourself," he displayed no honeyed humor. When he said, "Must we forgive these traitors as they forgive us? why, they do not forgive any body on earth," he was not of amnesty all kind. A member asks him, "Are there not sixty-four half-gills in a gallon? If I am not correct, the Chairman of Ways and Means will correct me." "I need not tell you. You have counted it a hundred times." This was in his happy mood, and perhaps more characteristic. And in the same vein, when once the question of taxing lager-beer came up, he humorously defended lager. "Its effects are eccentric and amusing," he said. "Many a night I have looked out of my house and seen the honest men who drank it stumble against the fence. Sometimes they knocked it down. I should therefore designate its effect, not as intoxicating, but rather as exhilarating." Once he remarked in a speech that he was not well; and hence he was diffuse. "A man always is diffuse when feeble, and feeble when diffuse." This had the playfulness of the lamb, with the point of one of Martial's epigrams. So has this: An appropriation is up for a sewer in Washington. "It is out of order," said one. "The sewer is,"

said Stevens, "but not the proposition." His sarcasm was not always thus curbed. "I do not," said he, "give the gentleman my censure or advice; the one is beyond my jurisdiction, and the other would do him no good." This was not a little sarcastic; but not more so than the next, "The style of these Congressional biographies is as various as the gentlemen who wrote them." Or, again, "The anecdotes of the gentleman are so startling that if he did not tell them, they would be incredible." This was one of Mr. Stevens's mockeries. He once withdrew the word "parasite," and substituted "satellite;" but he did it with a venomous reference to the little body revolving about the greater. "Who signed that paper? Is it signed at all?" he demanded fiercely of Vallandigham. "They didn't make their marks," was sarcastically answered. "And never will!" retorted Stevens. His diabolic wit shone with the *feu d'enfer* when he met James Brooks in a hot encounter. Mr. Brooks had said, in response to Stevens, very bitterly, "There are three gates in London renowned for peculiar architecture: Newgate, of the prisons; Cripplegate, of the cripples; Billingsgate, of the fish-women. The gentleman has studied his vocabulary in all three." "There is one gate which the gentleman will enter," retorted Stevens, "that I will try to avoid."

In contrast with this sardonic humor, let me recall one of the most playful speeches ever listened to. It was a short speech of Judge Holman's. It is remembered for a humor iridescent and fluttering. His subject was, "The economic plants," as they had been termed, raised under "the glass structure to make elegant bouquets for the delectation of officials." Is it too dainty a simile to say that the judicial mind on that occasion reminded me of

the *trochilidæ?* What are they? or, rather, "What is it?" It is to America what the sun-bird is to Europe. It is an airy sprite, "barrin' it's a bird." It has the lustre of topaz, emerald, and ruby on its plumery. It revels, as did my friend's raillery, amidst tropical blossoms which rivaled those jewels in hue. Like the humming-bird, from fuchsia to japonica, from sunny heliotrope to night-blooming cereus,

"Each rapid movement gave a different dye,"

as the judge, with the barbed and viscid tongue of the hummer, drew the mischievous insects, with the honey, from the flowery depths. He so illustrated his theme that the House was tickled into a vein of honest reform.

EVASIVE HUMOR.

One of the proofs of genuine humor is often found in the manner of adroitly avoiding the point. It is a part of the study of an English minister to parry a question. *We* have no cabinet in our Congress to be interrogated, but we have the American or habitual disposition to interrupt with a question "just here." It is a part of the daily legislative routine. It frets the callow and timid member until he gets "the hang of the House." I remember that in Proctor Knott's first speech he betrayed a fretful impatience, which, however, soon subsided into a lucid stream of humor. When interrupted, he cried out, "I believe if some members had been present at the Sermon on the Mount, they would have asked their Saviour to yield for a question."

No man had a better knack than General Banks for parrying these queries and making a diversion. His reply to a Mississippi member in 1854 is felicitous, not only

for the grandiose manner which the general always commands, but for the affected wisdom of the answer. "I am asked whether the black race is equal to the white? I answer: this can only be determined by the absorption or disappearance of one or the other; and I propose to wait until the respective races can be properly subjected to this philosophical test before I give a decisive answer." This would elicit laughter from a legislature of owls. So non-committal a member on the then prevailing topic was naturally preferred as Speaker of the House, which was of doubtful majority on either side.

During the same struggle, General Banks was called upon to explain his past career and record. Rising to the occasion, with a Junius-like pithiness, he said: "I am tired of explaining. Must a man take one half of his life to explain the other half?"

A question comes up as to the loyalty of a Southern member on a contested seat. How does his friend avoid the ugly issue for him? The answer is, "He was a timid, not a traitorous, man. Perhaps he did not believe—I do not know his religious sentiments, only he does not belong to my church, the Presbyterian, and perhaps he did not believe that whatever is to be, must be." The evasion was palpably ludicrous, if not damaging.

"Let me assure you that this income-tax is one of the hardest in the whole calendar—" "To collect," interrupted the House leader, Schenck, changing the tenor of the debate.

It is known that North Carolina was discovered by the Celts about the tenth century. Mr. Waddell, of the Wilmington district, has written two papers on the topic—one seriously to prove the assertion, and another in a humorous vein. In the latter, from certain Celtic peculiari-

ties among the red men, as carrying a war club (to wit, a shillalah, etc.), he argues the existence of the descendants of the British isles among our Indians. Nor is it altogether a myth or a joke. Affidavits are produced of men who heard and understood Celtic words among the Indians of the North-west about the time of our Revolution. In February, 1871, an extra appropriation was asked for the Auckarees, Gros Ventres, and Mandans, because, said the ex-Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Harlan, "they are red-haired, blue-eyed, and a great many of them. They never kill white men, and desire schools." This was all very pretty and plausible. Then the diversion or avoidance began. "If they are not Indians, why appropriate? If the Indians are peaceable, why spoil them? Some Indians scalp a few whites to make a fuss and be bought off. War and contracts are in the appropriation." Then and thus the facetiously facile Edmunds: "Give these Indians more money because their hair is red? Never, sir! It is an unconstitutional and colorable distinction. No republican country should tolerate it." Then, after touching up the ruddy blondes of the Senate, Senators Stewart and Conkling, the vote was taken, but the increase was not allowed. Besides, the red-haired red men had thus saved the new amendment, which does not allow discrimination.

Some men are greatly vexed at the smile of others while they are talking. One Senator is in a rage because another smiles to himself at an idea the first had expressed. The idea was that the Indians would hear of the debate, and act accordingly. When fiercely attacked for the smile, he calmly rejoined that it was only caused by a fancy of his own. He thought he saw "Lo! the poor Indian" reading the *Globe!* It was piling the Pelion of injury upon the Ossa of wrong to that race.

Some, however, never, when on the floor, lose their admirable temper. Interruptions, like the bowlders in the torrent, only make the song of the stream more musical. Mr. Stockton is a model, as will be seen by his remarks: "They have asked you for bread, and you—" Mr. WARNER. "Allow me to ask—" Mr. THURMAN. "Oh, do not interrupt!" Mr. STOCKTON. "The country will never know—the Senate, you, Mr. President, posterity, the world, will never know—how that sentence would have ended had it not been for this unfortunate interruption."

"What are these fifteen extra Capitol police for?" "To keep the people from stealing the bronze doors and carrying off the dome," said Dawes; but the laugh was bracketed thus, [great,] when he further and thus divertingly answered the argument, that they were necessary for the funerals of members: "If we are not more earnest in economy, our funerals will be attended to elsewhere, and without charge."

A chaplain is nominated. It is asked: "What are his politics?" It is thus deftly dodged: "He has none. He is a Christian."

Joseph R. Chandler, of Philadelphia, used his humor in graceful terms of avoidance; as when he referred to a union, based on improper objects. The coalition of Pilate and Herod was delicately cited as an unfavorable instance of harmony of interests, otherwise hostile. But, hostile as they had been, they agreed on a certain point, the result of which is better found elsewhere than quoted in Congress.

We were taxing petroleum. It was called the poor man's light, by a Pennsylvanian interested in the product. "Were there no poor men before this light was discovered? No light from fish-oils?" "That," said the Penn-

sylvanian, Mr. Scofield, eluding the point, "that was the 'light of other days.'"

A non-committal member was likened to a vessel, which sailed so completely in the eye of the wind that one could not tell whether he was a seventy-four gunship, or a Baltimore clipper with black sides and an African cargo.

General Houston upset the gravity of Senate and gallery on a debate about the navy. He actually whistled the boatswain's call in his speech. He was so berated for it that one day he arose seriously and said that he was sorry he had ever learned to whistle. This confession and avoidance was his only apology.

The Senate was once invoked not to act like the man who cursed Jay's treaty. Mr. Walton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, asked the man his objection to the treaty. He said it was an unconstitutional measure. "Well, my friend, have you read it?" "No, sir; do you suppose I would read an unconstitutional document?"

"Wherein, then, do my colleague and myself differ?" asked Vallandigham of Corwin. "I differ from my colleague on every question, except original sin," said Corwin; and the House caught the infection of the general temper which had such a comprehensive concord, so adroitly discursive.

"Have you faro-banks in your State?" "Yes, sir, and they are the least dishonest." "Are they banks of deposit?" "They are." "The gentleman should speak feelingly."

These retorts are akin to the epigrammatic argumentation and irony which belong to the next chapter.

XXI.

LEGISLATIVE HUMORS—EPIGRAM, ARGUMENT, AND IRONY.

"An epigram should be, if right,
Short, simple, pointed, keen, and bright,
A lively little thing.
Like wasp with taper body, bound
By lines, not many, neat and round,
All ending in a sting."

THE word "epigram" is a general term. The translation of the Latin definition prefixed to this chapter indicates its limitations and its functions. It comprehends not alone many instances of retort and repartee already given, but is included within every category of humor or wit. It appears, with its keen and lively qualities, as a winged prismatic wonder, and a stinging, perilous omnipresence, even in argument and burlesque, and always in irony and satire. It originally meant a terse inscription. The Greeks carved epigrams on their temples as they carved statues for the niches. With perfect taste, and with an eye to proportion and beauty, they utilized and concentrated the genius of their language to blazon the glories of their history. The dead were honored, and the heroic eulogized by epigrammatic memorial. Grecian thought endured the longer, because of the chaste brevity of the gemmed vehicle. Like the Pentelic statue, it was so nearly pure and nude that the scant attire only aided the idea it hardly covered and did not conceal.

As there was a simple refinement in the epigram, its pointed elegance left an impression, not unlike that of apothegm, parable, satire, wit, and humor. Hence its signification has been enlarged by use and time. New meaning has been given to the term in later eras. Its office now is to surprise and delight. It ridicules vanity and vulgarity. It checks impudence and arrogance. It corrects bad taste and manners. It has the sanction of the best writers and the holiest of religions.

For instance, when an epigram hints at a prudent matrimonial match, where the bridegroom chose the bride like old plate, not for the fashion, but for the weight; or at another marriage, where the man married the woman when she was quite *petite*, and after she had grown to weigh three hundred pounds, was accused of Big-amy; or a candle-thief, when caught, was reproached for stealing what must needs come to light; when it is said that treason never prospers, because when prosperous it is not treason; when a bad man is called a cheat if he should be honest; when a lover, who had plighted an eternal vow, afterward found his chosen one changed in face and mind, and called it perjury to continue to love her; when, in verse and prose, the old play on the phrase "all flesh is grass" grows into the fat man's load of hay; or the man, bitten by his horse, who followed the Scriptural definition and took his master for grass, these, and other familiar examples when versified, have been called epigrammatic. But they have other qualities, and appear as well in the oratory of the forum as in the distich of the versifier.

Sometimes this wit consists in a quaint commingling of opposites as incongruous as "lutes and lobsters, seas of milk and ships of amber." It is a species of argumen-

tation. It belongs to the *reductio ad absurdum.* It is epigrammatic. One of the most eloquent members, Mr. Fitch, of Nevada, used it frequently. Referring to the Indian appropriations in this vein, he said, "What a mixed assortment of Quakers and blankets, saw-mills and school-books, to send to vicious and unappreciative savages!"

"Those who know but little of finance," said a Senator, "talk a great deal, those who know a great deal talk but little, and those who know all about it do not talk at all."

Again, it was remarked, "The minority of the Senate is small; in the House it is respectable in numbers; in the Senate, in character."

John P. Hale, when badgered to explain, once remarked: "I never said that all the Democrats were rascals; only that all the rascals were Democrats."

An original paraphrase for a "pork thief" was once made by a Virginian, "Scoundrels who had plenty of pork in the winter and no hogs in summer."

"Let the Senate clear the galleries." "You will be fortunate," said the witty Wigfall, "if the galleries do not clear the Senate." This was in the days when Benjamin's musical voice allured Southern men and women to the Senate.

"As this man has been standing on one leg in our service for ten months," said Benton, "every gentleman who has got two legs ought to stand up for this man." The pension was passed.

Mike Walsh sometimes struck out an antithesis. "I would not barter the practical knowledge I have learned in lumber and ship yards for all the Latin of ancient Rome. I would rather speak sense in one language than nonsense in fifty."

Colonel Benton humorously described the use the Digger Indians made of a long, slender stick, with a metallic hook at the end of it. They catch lizards with it, for food. "What a godsend for hooks," he argued, "is the telegraph-wire. It gives life to the Digger, but death to the lizard."

LOGICAL HUMOR.

This rhetoric has often the cogency of pointed and humorous logic and keen irony. It is too brief to be eloquent; and yet we can not get enough of it. It is like the peddler's excuse in Boucicault's play of "The Shaughraun," where the fiddler relates how he avoided the pledge not to drink more than a thimbleful. There was no other thimble in the house except a tailor's thimble, and it never got full!

Was that not a pleasing argument, made by a member under arrest, after a call, that the Constitution provided "that members shall be privileged from arrest while going to and returning from the sessions of the House?"

"The man is to be hung if he does the act, and to be hung if he does not," said Senator Doolittle, in reference to certain State laws against the Federal fugitive law. "If so, it does not make any difference to him. Then, in a certain case, the State law is void." "And the hanging, too," said Mr. Benjamin. "But the hanging would be a certainty, and not void for uncertainty." And the lawyers had their smile at the legal quiddity.

Judge Douglas once made a humorous argument against secession. "Here you deny the right to coerce, and here by its side is a proposition to buy Cuba for three hundred millions. Would it not be a brilliant achievement to buy Cuba, let her secede, then re-annex

herself to Spain, and sell her out at half or double price, according to the gullibility of the purchaser?"

The polar expedition asks an appropriation. Some one demands a separate vote on the north pole. It is an argument against remote enterprise.

A member ridiculed a lot of abstract resolutions against rebellion by moving a resolution to abolish the rebellion.

"Old age," said Butler, "is honorable, but voracious," as he referred to the longevity of army rations, thus avoiding the *ad misericordiam*, to kill the bill.

An appropriation is up for a custom-house. It is said that more has been spent on it already than would build two at certain other points. Then Mr. Toombs asked, quaintly, but logically, how they could set off one abuse by another? It reminded him of a case of slander, where a set-off had been pleaded. The plaintiff had spoken worse of the defendant than the defendant of the plaintiff. His point was, that all abuses are natural allies!

That was no irrelevant logic which drove into an extreme the abstractions of a Virginian of the old school. He was about to die; and in his last moments he begged not to be buried at the public expense, as he was satisfied it was unconstitutional.

"Why, who is the author of institutions? It is He who sitteth upon the circuit of the heavens; and before him all the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers. If, then, he has established certain relations between grasshoppers of one color and grasshoppers of another color, be assured they will stand!" Thus, with ironic logic and phraseology, Mr. Eli Thayer discussed sovereignty and grasshoppers, irrespective of color or race. Again, in the same debate, he said, "I am told by my colleague that this is the *ancient* policy of the Government. It is not so

old as Satan, not so old as Sin, the daughter of Satan. It is old enough to die." John Stuart Mill has many pages to demonstrate the fallacy which this epigram refutes.

"It is a grave question whether a dead man can resign. His duty is to be resigned." This was one of the argumentative waggeries of Mr. Hale on a legal point. It arose on Henry Clay's resignation, which was presented after his decease and the appointment of his successor. Not satisfied with invading the realm of poesy to call some bird from the shadowy land, to answer the question whether they resign there or not, the orator called the ghost of departed Denmark, and put the question to that grisly personage:

> "Oh, answer me!
> Let me not burst in ignorance! but tell,
> Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
> Have burst their cerements?"

Of all the debates which are distinguished by the facile *ad absurdum*, spiced with quaint allusion, roving fancies, pithy points, pretty unexpectednesses, and dexterous supplements of sense, this argument about the shadowy realm evoked the most humor. "More merry tones the passion of loud laughter never shed." If the clever man is one who can readily devise and adapt means to an end, who has contrivance and execution instinctive and ready; if, as Emerson, in his recent lucubration on the comic, contends, the essence of all jokes is an honest halfness and a break of continuity in the intellect; if comedy consists in looking with considerate good nature at every object in existence aloof, as a man might look at a mouse, comparing it with the Eternal Whole; if, before the Ideal and the True, yawning discrepancies appear, to give us the

pleasant spasms of laughter; if, in fine, as our transcendentalist teaches, the perception of humor is the balance-wheel in our metaphysical structure, the essential element of a fine character, the tie of sympathy and pledge of sanity, making its own welcome and leveling all distinctions, even of religion and the tomb—then John P. Hale, Falstaffian in size, and Voltairian in wit, has seldom had a parliamentary peer.

There are ears so callous to logic, so shut against the Circean strains of rhetoric, and so impervious to the telegraphic impetuosity of epigram, that they can not be entranced by any device except that of an illusory illustration. A tinsel metaphorical wand or a tickling trope of straw has more potency than all the predicables of the school-men. For example: Since the repeal by England of the duty on wool, it was argued in Congress that there were an increased production and price. The fashion of answering this, by a protectionist, was amusing: "Within the last five years they have put cow-catchers on the front of locomotives; and since then, instead of fifteen miles an hour, as on the old flat-bar rail, the train goes thirty, forty, sixty miles an hour; therefore the cow-catcher increases the speed!" The humor is not in the fallacy, but in the unique illustration, which, with many, takes the form of reasoning. The fallacious poison escapes detection in the pleasing dilution of imagery.

Sugar-duties produce an acid debate. Judge Trumbull is arguing against the doctrine that the higher the duty, the lower the price; and illustrated it by a transparency in a torchlight procession out in a Western town, on a rainy night and a muddy road. A tall, gangling sort of man, with his pantaloons tucked in his boots, carried the transparency. On it was the motto, "The deeper the

mud, the dryer the ground!" The absurd *non sequitur* was equally transparent with the humor.

"Every thing is unconstitutional with some," said a member. "This measure is, anyhow," replied an opponent. "Oh no," said the other; "the Supreme Court has decided otherwise." "But," was the rejoinder, "the Supreme Court is unconstitutional!"

"I do not ask for the doubt of a star-gazer looking through a telescope, when he is hesitating whether a certain thing in the moon is an elephant, a lion, or a lizard: I speak of reasonable doubts." This was metaphysical physics.

IRONICAL HUMOR.

"How," said Mr. Winthrop, "have we extended our limits in Oregon by ceding away half of it to England?" This is as exact as geometry.

One of the sharpest pieces of humorous ironical logic was that which argued for a subsidy to steamships under the constitutional clause to "make rules concerning captures on land and water." The proposition would capture eight hundred thousand dollars per annum on land from the Treasury, to be used on the water! Another point was, that the steamers were deep-draught. They drew thirty-three feet—from the national treasury!

There was a proposition to lay gas-pipes to the District Penitentiary. Mr. Hale jocosely hinted that a good many men find their way there without being lighted by gas.

Governor Vance, of North Carolina, once proposed that there should not be paid on the Capitol extension, for labor or materials, more than twice as much as the cost elsewhere.

Mr. Hale once remarked, with pleasant equivoque, that if he said "the *distinguished* Senator from Mississippi," no one would know which of the two he meant. On another occasion this was applied to Banks and Butler: "The distinguished general from Massachusetts, if any body can tell which one it is."

There was a debate on the Dred Scott decision, and the question of color was mooted. "Is it," said a member, "a disqualification on a Virginia hustings for a man to boast of having the blood of Pocahontas?"

An eccentric speaker once made this point of half humor and half logic: "Whoever answers, 'I am perfect,' condemns himself. There is none perfect except the long-faced kin of that immaculate old man in the Testament, who, with a long robe on, thanked God he was not like other men!"

"What!" exclaims a member, "appropriate this seventy-five thousand dollars for sending cotton-seeds to Maine, and dandelions and johnny-jump-ups all around! But will the seeds ever produce their like, and appear above ground? Why, my tobacco-seeds came up mulleins!"

I had the honor once to propose to inflate the currency by moving to stamp all ones as twos, all fives as tens, etc., whereat a brilliant member intimated that I was a noun with a profanatory prefix. Yet was I not endeavoring to save the cost of printing new notes and all the risks of counterfeits?

Senator Morrill, of Vermont, once made himself a similar target by moving to a railroad grant that any body in any State should have power to build a railroad from any one spot to another, and have all the lands not claimed by any other railroad. This was seriously pronounced

simply ridiculous, in fact, impossible — really out of the question.

Judge Van Trump, of Ohio, desired General Schenck to answer whether he would follow into other investments the interest on the new bonds by exempting it from tax. "Suppose a man," said Schenck, in reply, "has a quantity of whisky, on which whisky there is now levied a tax, and he swaps it off for a horse, you do not continue to tax that horse as whisky." The verbose and complicated query of the dignified judge was simplified amazingly, and the House enjoyed the whisky and rode the horse.

The Civil Rights Bill is up, and so is Mr. Sumner. The Pacific coast is aroused, and so is the Chinese topic. A motion is made to keep the Celestials out of the benefaction of the bill. Then the large-hearted and large-bodied Senator M'Creery moves, and his motion comprehends the argument. It is that the act shall not apply to persons born in Asia, Africa, or any of the isles of the Pacific, nor to Indians born in the wilderness. And yet with what grace did this liberal Senator last Congress receive his colored highness Kalakaua in the Capitol! We served together on the reception committee, but we had *white* gloves and *mouchoirs*, and thus saved *our* colors.

Mr. Wood once made a startling point humorously as to the duty on Cuba sugar. It was that his Republican brethren were offering a premium on slave labor. He vociferated for tellers, amidst a roar of logical fun, "to see who were the friends of slavery." There was sweetness in the House all day.

Senator Stockton used to strike a happy track of easy-going and ironic *naïveté*, as when he once pictured the effects of a repeal of the frank on the distribution of

speeches. "He was honored," he said, "in listening to the speeches, and taking advantage of their grace of manner as well as their beauty of diction; but when he was taken away, ah, what a consolation, in his declining years, to be enabled to lay down the grand masters, whose footsteps, etc., in the corridors, etc., resound, etc., and take up the speeches of such Senators as Nye and Carpenter!"

"Again," said Judge Drake, derogating from the utility of the *Globe*, "at what price is the Government to save these untold millions, when no longer shall go down through the streams and rivulets of the *Globe* to the present and future generations the eloquence of Senators! Sir, the price is too great for such a deprivation."

"When a man dies *in office* his like can never be found again!" said a Celtic Senator, ironically.

"This iron was detained by what may be called the act of God—the lake froze and the increase of duty accrued. Let it be relieved!" "Oh no," said Ross, of Illinois, "as the Almighty is on the side of the Government, and not of the railroads, we ought to take advantage of it."

A more innocent species of humor was displayed upon a dispute of boundary. New York once had an interest in Vermont. Vermont had to pay New York forty thousand dollars before she was admitted as a State. "It is the impression in Vermont," said General Banks, in a quizzical way, "that this payment was the foundation of New York's prosperity."

Mr. Senator Tipton, arguing ironically for permanency in the officers of the Government, intimated that he would carry the idea so far that when occasionally one should die, he would bury him in a vault under the building, in

order that the outside and greedy world should not know that a vacancy had occurred in the inside.

"The gentleman so declares for economy that the wheels of the universe must be stopped because they consumed too much grease." This was one of Mr. Donnelly's good and not illogical hits upon the frugal Mr. Washburne.

It was proposed to send naturalization papers to Europe in advance of emigration, to be used on arrival. This was saying one thing and meaning another. It was irony; and at whose instance, and to whose injury, General Schenck must answer.

In the same vein it was proposed by Senator Saulsbury to amend the Constitution so as to remove all distinction of color, or, failing that, that there should be but one color. He would compromise on blue. It was instanced that when swine were neither black nor white, they were of that cerulean hue. It was also proposed by similar reasoning to abolish "sex." Then Congress could give its whole attention to a blue and sexless people, without so many intricate problems to harass. A shrewder piece of masked meaning was that of a Republican member who proposed that the blacks exclusively, in the District of Columbia, should have an election to decide whether or not in their opinion whites should vote.

A member is speaking; he is ruled out of order; he is seated. Then a wag moves to "extend his time," to wit, the time of his continuance in his seat. This, of course, is a delicate piece of irony, and fills the definition of that ill-natured word; for does not the Greek root of the word indicate a censorious sort of wit, and imply simulation and dissimulation?

These instances suggest that the American Legisla-

ture, like the American everywhere else, is estopped by no subject, when his sense of humor is aroused. Wherever there is a loud promise and a poor performance; whatever is out of place and time; whatever deranges plans and disturbs calculations; whenever there is a break in logical or sentimental continuity; whenever any thing appears fragmentary or abortive; whenever there is any thing mean, skulking, or delinquent; whenever dignity is opinionative, dumpish, or diabolical; whenever good principles are espoused by faulty and false folks; and whether the subject be serious or mirthful, scientific or superficial, the American will have his jibe and joke, and his mercurial temper overflows at once with its perception.

XXII.

LEGISLATIVE BURLESQUE.

"Men—plugless word-spouts, whose deep fountains are within their lungs."—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

"It pleases by extravagancy."—HAZLITT.

IT is said that no one can be eloquent whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated, capricious, and non-sequacious. This is affirmed by De Quincey and Coleridge. They regarded separate, or fractional, ideas as so discontinuous as to break the relation of manifold ideas and their mode of evolution from each other; and hence, as a consequence, the smooth, rolling flow of expression is wanting. Without this, eloquence is absent. The mere splinterings of phrase or image fail to throw the deep suffusions of color and the masses of mighty shadow which make up the picture and soul of oratory. Wit and reason are too solitary and flashing, epigram and repartee are too fragmentary and sententious, for the copiousness and opulence of rhetoric. Eloquence may be fleeting also; but it is not impatient of immediate effects: it can afford to wait for the applause and crown which popular appreciation gives, as, with voice and gesture, metaphor and passion, the artistic genius of the forum rises to the height of his great argument!

Even in burlesque we find a species of logical humor; but it gives occasion for more of that redundancy which belongs to eloquence. Although it is reckoned in the

lower rank, yet it is more useful and delightful than the aggravating retort. The easy repartee, the babbling gossip, the prattling puerility, which too often pass current for "good humor," are not comparable with burlesque. Not one ray of light, but a whole orb sometimes, glows with a diffusive splendor, from the contrast which burlesque weaves between the subject and the manner of treating it.

On a proposition to send black and white children to the same school, Mr. Senator Norwood hit off the project in a spreading eloquence quite enjoyable: "He proposes to capture them with a lasso, drag them humanely to the same school-room, tie them on the same forms, lash their arms together to hold the same book, fix their eyes on the same page, make their eyeballs stationary, and then, by some patent process as yet unknown to any one except the inventor of this exquisite machinery for the propagation of knowledge and peace among men, to wind up their brains like eight-day clocks, and set their tongues, like pendulums, in motion, to tick out learning in harmonious measure."

How musically expansive was Senator M'Creery on the currency speech of Senator Morton! "He began his voyage amidst the convulsions of revolution, circumnavigated the globe, visiting England, Germany, France, and Spain, and, more fortunate than Captain Cook, he entered the ports of redemption and reconstruction with flying streamers, under cloudless skies, and impelled by pleasant breezes!"

As early as 1869 a member made this distended and burlesque but pious appeal in behalf of the red man: "Let an honest man be sent out to see that the Indians get what we appropriate; and if we can not find such a

man, let us appeal to the Almighty to send one down from the bright azure regions above."

When General Nye eloquently remarked that the Goddess of Liberty had her home in the mountains of Nevada, Governor Hendricks pricked his swollen balloon by remarking, "Quite a solitary residence for the lady." Nye rejoined that Liberty was a mountain nymph; that the flag when it went down elsewhere would find its barricade in the mountain fastnesses, where our people inhale liberty in the air they breathe, unmingled with the malaria of States located in that aguey country along the beautiful Ohio. Indiana called for quinine and whisky.

Senator Logan once made a burly burlesque of the Indian commissioner on a high horse, booted and spurred, lassoing the Indian children on the plains to put blue breeches on them; and the House was quick to take in the scene. It was the forerunner of Proctor Knott's race of the Indians after buffaloes, and driving them into the corrals of Duluth.

A military member was described by a brother member as having marched with his spurs buckled around his waist, and his sword dangling from his boots.

"There is not a sheep from the green hills of Vermont to the mountain ranges of California, where sheep are slaughtered by tens of thousands, that does not in his dying moments ejaculate as to both of these revenue arguments on wool, 'Baa! baa!'" This was from Mr. Brooks, of New York, and was effective.

These inflated expressions, by the unexpected escape of gas, are often compelled to come to earth. Two notable instances should be recorded where inflation collapsed under humor. The humor in one case was by

General Butler, and in the other by Mr. Evarts before the impeachment legislative tribunal. General Butler used to answer Mr. Bingham's rhetorical flights about the land drenched with the blood of millions, and the gathered wisdom of the Constitution, by saying, "I always did like that speech."

No happier dash of logical fun is to be found than the playful allusion of Mr. Evarts, in the impeachment case, to Mr. Boutwell's untenanted and unappropriated region in the skies reserved for the punishment of deposed Presidents. It was a legal, loyal, and astronomical answer to the swelling oratory of Boutwell; for, said he, "removals from office" are not limited to the distance of the removal; so that without blood, or penalty, or punishment, instant removal is transportation to the skies. Thereupon he suggested Governor Boutwell as the deputy who alone knew the locality and how to execute judgment. *Sic itur ad astra.* Let me do justice by quoting the residue of this witty response, which so effectually plugged Boutwell's "hole in the sky," or rather filled the dark void with stellar splendors:

"But here a distressing doubt strikes me. How will the manager get back? He will have got too far beyond the reach of gravitation to restore him, and so ambitious a wing as his could never stoop to a downward flight. Indeed, as he passes through the constellations, that famous question of Carlyle, by which he derides the littleness of human affairs upon the scale of the measure of the heavens, 'What thinks Böotes as he drives his hunting dogs up the zenith in their leash of sidereal fire?' will force itself on his notice. What, indeed, would Böotes think of this new constellation? Besides, reaching this space, beyond the power of Congress even 'to send for persons

and papers,' how shall he return, and how decide in the contest, there become personal and perpetual, the struggle of strength between him and the President? In this new revolution, thus established forever, who shall decide which is the sun and which is the moon? who determine the only scientific test which reflects the hardest upon the other?"

Speaking of and for manifest destiny, Eli Thayer once portrayed the descendants of the Pilgrims, cramped between the Atlantic Ocean and the Rocky Mountains. They were in a tight place. In the Southern States the population was not cribbed and confined; for had they not eighty-nine hundredths of a man to the square mile? No one in the Congressional debates more pithily put the question of Yankee tact and thrift, or more splendidly enlarged upon it, than this member. "When a man can do a good thing, and at the same time make money by it, all his faculties are in harmony."

There is this incident in the early history of the Puritan: "'Fore God!" King James once remarked; "it is the apostle's own calling. Go, worship God, and catch fish!" But when the Pilgrims were assailed, did Thayer defend them? No. "Whether assailed by the long bow of Robin Hood, or the *shorter* one" (referring to Judge Shorter, an Alabamian of rare gifts of eloquence), "I would as soon think of defending the Falls of Niagara or the White Mountains."

Colonel Benton once displayed the enterprise of New England by an anecdote of Christophe, Emperor of Hayti: "Hang up a bag of coffee in hell," said his majesty, "and a Yankee would go down and bring it up without being singed."

In pleading for a Texas route to the Pacific, Govern-

or Hamilton once indulged in a mock welcome with a free thought, which takes an aquiline feather for its lofty flight: "When you come to us, you will have a cheerful welcome. Perhaps we will spread a collation. The broad prairies may be the festive board; the mangled bodies of fallen tyrants may form the repast, and the wolf and the vulture be the invited guests." He called this an ebullition of feeling.

An Indiana member animadverts on Virginia, compares its fallen condition with Indiana, when a Virginian interposes to hint that Indiana repudiated her debt. The Indianian then began his analysis. There was a physical, political, or moral cause for the dwarfing of Virginia. Could it be physical? "Where, I ask you, under the bright sun, is there a more genial climate, a more fertile soil, a more delightful region, than Old Virginia? Where, oh! where, do the zephyrs blow so refreshingly? Where, oh! where, rolls the rivulet more gently, or where sing the birds more charmingly?" "You refer to Harper's Ferry," said a solemn voice; and the zephyrs quit blowing, the birds were mute, and the rivulet was dammed.

It was not often that Senator Hunter, of Virginia, endeavored to placate the House by festive figures of speech; but on one occasion he was happy in describing how another Senator careered through those old Arabic numerals fleeter than the wild horse of Bürger. Woe, then, to the horse; and woe to the rider! "I tremble," said he, "at the idea that the Senator from Kentucky should get among the flower-gardens of the Senator from Massachusetts; for I know him well, and I feel perfectly assured that not the gardens of Alcinous, nor the blandishments of Calypso, nor the cup of Circe, nor the charms of Armida, would seduce him into a moment's

dalliance, if they stood in the way of his course to public justice. Sir, he is after his share of the public lands, and he would tread down these gay parterres as remorselessly as so much wild heather, if they stood between him and his object."

"Why, sir," said Butler, of South Carolina, "one of the Senator's Sempronian speeches would raise a spirit that would induce the people of his section to charge a British fleet on horseback." This referred to General Cass's warlike Anglophobia. Referring to Bonaparte's peculiar pronunciation of *d'armée*, Butler played upon General Cass's pronunciation of "war." It was simply superb—every letter of it. Name "cod-fish," and it says "War!"

The question was about filling up the marsh near the White House. It was made ground. The insalubrity of the ground would not prevent any one running for President. That was admitted. The making of ground in order to sell it and the riparian rights were discussed learnedly, and thus derisively illustrated: A Yankee was once approached by a European, who asked, "Well, you have approached the Pacific coast; you have gone up the Pacific border. Where now will you go?" "Well, now, don't take on any airs. We are carting the Rocky Mountains out into the Pacific, to make a hundred miles of land there."

There was a captain of militia who resigned, and bid his companions, as he moved onward and upward, perceive the garlands which he would hang upon Mars, the fiery star of war, as he disappeared in the empyrean.

When Mr. Dayton was Senator from New Jersey, he caused to be read a paper which was attached to a report from the post-office committee in relation to mail transportation across Panama to Oregon. The crazy

speculations of the paper he regretted, as it had the *imprimatur* of his committee and of the Senate. During its reading, as will appear by the *Globe* of May, 1846, the Senate was convulsed with laughter, and the galleries absolutely roared with merriment. The style of the report was as grand as that of the man who, ascending the loftiest peaks of the Rocky Mountains, gazed down and cried, "Attention, the world! Kingdoms! right about face!" The debate does not reveal the author. He is referred to as an able person, who had been in Oregon, and who was possessed of some fancy. The report began with describing Oregon as an irregular rhomboid, turned toward the west. Then it shows how, in Europe and Asia, the rivers descend from common radiant points, and, diverging every way from one another, no intercommunication exists between them. From the central barriers of the Himalayas run the four great rivers of China, and discharge themselves under the rising sun!

Then, all aglow with the progressive growth of America, the expansion begins: What have we not done? Nothing but an extract will answer the question:

"The American people have, during two centuries, grown from nothing to 20,000,000 people; their annual production reaches $1,500,000,000; their marine is the most complete, powerful, and efficient of any in existence. * * * It bears a very trifling ratio to the pyramid of production on which it rests, and is capable of unlimited enlargement, without endangering its solidity. * * * The choking of old markets, combined with the tearing rapidity with which the agricultural population absorbs the wilderness, partially indicated by the annual sales of the national domain, operates as a double depression upon the value of produce, which is continually augmenting.

Fronting the Union, on every side, is a vast army of pioneers. Before the march of this pioneer army all obstacles must succumb. It has never been known to stop or to recede; wherever it enters, it occupies. We see countries more extensive than the empires of Alexander or Napoleon overrun and settled throughout in the life of a single generation. Obstructions disappear before its rolling volume as stars are swallowed up beneath a thundercloud. The improvidence of Government in failing to understand its movements and provide for its advance has repeatedly involved the nation. The Government of the Union is no more able to tie up its progress than it is possible to hold the winds in a net. * * * In an unhappy hour, the Government, miscalculating this progressive growth, and misinformed as to the agricultural excellence of the great prairie region, unwisely located upon the western border a multitude of transported Indians, and proclaimed this line impassable to the white man, and the region beyond closed to the advancing pioneers. Incessantly accumulating, this chafing multitude, like an eagle contending with the bars of its cage, spread north, and plunging into Iowa, fomented the wars of Blackhawk and the Prophet. Wonderful and incomprehensible spectacle! While the great pioneer army is thus noiselessly establishing new nations, grasping a continent, and throwing open a new ocean, an American Congress and American statesmen, living at home at ease on a fat revenue, are laboring to convince the world, and believe themselves, that the prairies are impassable to their troops, and the ocean and rivers to their ships; asserting sovereignty, yet refusing protection. Proving that what women and children have performed by their unassisted means is *impossible* to be attempted by the select braves, the

enormous revenues, and resources of the great American people. Grand spectacle, prodigious wisdom, consummate and brave caution! If, while this sublime scene is enacting at Washington, ten thousand isolated Americans perish by the tomahawk, and Oregon is lost thereby, what imperishable glory will surround our statesmen! * * *

"We behold the great American Republic become in fact the most powerful people among the nations of the earth, her commerce overreaching that of Great Britain herself in every sea, and that commerce, as yet, only in the sinewy vigor of the infant Hercules. The commerce of England has reached its culminating era; the vital sap imperceptibly stagnates, retaining only the fungus evergreen of the mistletoe, and verging to the turning edge, when follows a headlong decadence. A tremulous, fretful jealousy, common from the old toward the young, shakes this antique aristocracy. A helpless sense of growing decrepitude gnaws their vitals. * * * The wealthy citizen of the Atlantic sea-board, intent on trade, forever contemplating the ocean in front of him, refining upon the naval armament displayed to alarm him, and perpetually exaggerating its magnitude, cheapening the power and resources of his own nation, and incessantly torturing himself with imaginary fears of war, devastation, and destruction, lives a prey to Promethean anxiety, which never sleeps and continually revives. * * * Is the unparalleled agriculture, on which is constructed the solid superstructure of the nation, which generates States, and furnishes the heaped mass of production about to subdue the world, to which commerce and manufactures are but as the foliage to the majestic trunk—is this alone to be forgotten in the general charge, and left to stagger beneath unmerited burdens, and the probing goad of in-

gratitude? But the destiny of our nation has become now clearly revealed, and great events, quickening in the womb of time, reflect their clearly defined shadows into our very eyeballs. These events are the imperial extension of the Republic over the Northern continent, and our accession to the commercial dominion of the Oriental seas.

"Oh, why does a cold generation frigidly repel ambrosial gifts like these, or sacrilegiously hesitate to embrace their glowing and resplendent fate? Wonderful Government, which deliberates coldly when asked to embrace in its arms and gather to its bosom this chivalrous scion! Dreadful and dangerous timidity, when a great empire of twenty millions meditates to make outcasts of its heroic children! Sacrilegious and amazing infamy, which tampers with so grand a destiny, and ponders on decimating so brilliant an empire! And this beneath the aggravating and infernal threats of the intolerant hyena of the seas! * * * Are not the arrogant threats of Lords and Commons to ravish from us our territory by war and cannon still reverberating from the British council-halls? These acts of aggressive intrigue and infernal arrogance have just now been perpetrated, and are most recent history. At this moment a new plot is under trial, the experimental opening scene of which is being enacted on the La Plata. It is the designed and not concealed intention of the European tyrannies to carve into convenient morsels, and dish up for themselves, this continent of America—to each a trencher filled, spiced, and cooked, to gorge each particular appetite; for Brazil, an extended imperial sway; for France, a Mexican monarchy; for Britain, more colonial possessions, to be annually raked empty with the drag-net of her commercial sys-

tem. Is old Europe forever, like a malignant step-hag, to swing to and fro over our heads, and hurl into our faces, the flagellating lash of her malice? Shall the harpy aristocracies, filthy and ravenous birds of prey, by divine right forever hover over our heads, and souse down on our Republic, and leave nothing, not even our vacant territory, unrent, unrifled, unravished, and unpolluted by the slime of their filthy offal?

"The men of these two great enterprises of which we have spoken may not be thwarted. The ambition of the one incarcerates him in the womb of a ship, to pursue, over the boundless ocean and through exciting dangers, the capture of the salt-sea monster; his spoil is blubber; oil illumes the long night of his home, ivory rolls over the billiard-table, and whalebone bends to the fancies of female taste, and rescues the wilderness from savage masters and idle nature. The American nation is ineradicably planted upon the Pacific sea-board now at this hour! Our brave citizens and their wives have done this. Shall this sinewy child of Oregon be cast, like Œdipus in ancient days, to perish on the rocks, far from the maternal breast? Will not such infanticide recoil upon the motherland in pestilence and incest and tragic horrors? Little of danger and alarm has the rapacious and malignant hostility of England, or mankind in mass, to terrify our hearts, compared with the domestic hearth, bristling with the empoisoned fangs of ingratitude and bitter hate! Let no American blunder into this sacrilegious scission of the forty-ninth degree. Let the whole unanimous nation rise to grapple to us the whole of Oregon, uncompromised and unimpaired! Without this upper half, our territory is fatally docked, and its symmetry gone. In the undine and fluvial regions of the Iowa Mesopotamia; in

the grand delta of the concentrated trunk of the Mississippi; in the wonderful Piedmont that slopes down from the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains, and accompanies them through our whole territory; and, above all, in the sublime expanse of prairie plains around which these are gathered, as eaglets to the bosom of their dame, has the infinite taste of the Creator grouped in radiant glory the softest and most brilliant beauties of his creation. Nor in less choice and transcending sublimity has he piled toward heaven the Titanic structures of basalt that tower over our Western sea-board.

"To describe in detail this last wonderful portion of creation, so happily found in the possession of the American people, is an effort which only idle vanity would undertake, and which genius would fail worthily to accomplish. For arable agriculture, it is unsurpassed; for pastoral agriculture, unequaled; in maritime position, transcendent; in mountains, sublime; in valleys, beautiful; everywhere fertile; embracing grand rivers, the noblest forests; and in climate dry, temperate, and salubrious. To know and appreciate the wonderful grandeur and value of this new country is glorious to the patriotic and sensible. To deny its excellence and traduce its value is the characteristic of a narrow heart and a peddling politician. * * * The untransacted destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent—to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean—to animate the many hundred millions of its people, and to cheer them upward—to set the principle of self-government at work—to agitate these herculean masses—to establish a new order in human affairs—to set free the enslaved—to regenerate superannuated nations—to change darkness into light—to stir up the sleep of a hundred centuries—to

teach old nations a new civilization—to conform the destiny of the human race—to carry the career of mankind to its culminating point—to cause stagnant people to be reborn to perfect science—to emblazon history with the conquests of peace—to shed a new and resplendent glory upon mankind—to unite the world in one social family—to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity—to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and shed blessings round the world. Divine task! immortal mission! Let us tread fast and joyfully the open trail before us. Let every American heart open wide for patriotism to glow undimmed, and confide with religious faith in the sublime and prodigious destiny of his well-loved country."

When Colonel Sevier, of Arkansas, chairman of the committee whence emanated this remarkable paper, replied, he was not altogether infelicitous; he carried the burlesque war upon Mr. Dayton. He proved that our grandiloquent bird was not altogether co-existent and co-external with the infinite universe, like the Norse eagle, but had its sublime eyrie in New Jersey. He proved that the New Jersey Senator had himself once said that "the crack of our rifle is being heard on the mountains of Oregon, reverberating from the Rocky Mountains across the valley of the Mississippi to the Alleghanies, thence sweeping across the Atlantic Ocean, and finding its resting-place on the shores of Europe."

The laugh was thus turned against the jocose Jerseyman. Seldom has the American Congress had so patriotic and magnificent an effusion for its convulsive delectation as this literary curiosity. It was the reality of Proctor Knott's ironical ideal.

The muse of Dr. Holmes has sung in swelling numbers of our lake, sea, shore, prairie, forest, and mountain, and

of the omnivorous American eye that devours them all. His Urania has compassed the tallest summits and the broadest tides; and from the thundering ocean to the rolling Missouri—from the tropics to the poles—her home all space and her birth-place everywhere, she has sung her biggest and her best, about the wonders of that babe of Nature in the giant West! And yet, notwithstanding such reports about Oregon, and such remarkable reports from the crack of our rifle, his muse has dared to be didactic and modest. She hints that the Mississippi is not the only inspiration for the tuneful maid, and not the only theme for our abounding rhetoric; and that even the little Mincio, dribbling to the Po, may beat all the epics of the Hoang Ho!

XXIII.

MISCELLANEOUS LEGISLATIVE HUMORS.

"Joyous mirth
Engages our raised souls; pat repartee,
Or witty joke, our airy senses moves
To pleasant laughter."—GAY.

LET me hang upon my string a few more legislative pearls, or imitations, perhaps, of various colors and shapes, and which can only be defined as miscellaneous humors.

Judge Cartter once described the volunteers as a force which marched under the command of the impulses of their hearts, and who fired without the order.

My predecessor from Ohio, Dr. Olds, who had a facetiæ of rare quality and an admirable elocution to show it, once argued in favor of the Homestead Law. He confirmed the deed of every one to one hundred and sixty acres of land, by quoting as Biblical authority "Watts's Hymns" as to the clear title of the Christian to mansions in the skies. It was received with infinite zest.

A member from Alabama, oddly referring to joy and justice as twin sisters, said that "a good laugh has a good heart under it; but when I see a juror gloomy and dark-browed, cutting his tobacco into snuff, I know he is ready to say, 'Guilty! guilty!'"

"I can't get a dollar to drag the snags out of the Mississippi; but here you stand, with smiling faces, spending sixty thousand dollars a year for morning-glories!" Mr.

Keitt gallantly defended the conservatory, with its jumping-johnnies and sweet-williams, against such an attack. It was a "*miscellaneous*" appropriation — Miss Lane, the accomplished niece of President Buchanan, then presiding at the White House. That gallant pun cost the people a thousand dollars in the appropriation.

That was not a very elegant, though an original, remark of a member, that there was a class of politicians who would dispute the right of a poor devil afflicted with the itch to scratch himself.

"It may astonish some of you here that a gentleman should rise up in the Capitol of this great nation and admit the fact that he is from Arkansaw. I am from Arkansaw, sar!" Mr. Warren, who thus advertised his State abnegation and his personal courage, was a man to be remembered. A gentler man never looked a catamount in the eye. I remember his broad-voweled jocularity. He once invited me to his State, as he said, to have a "far and squar' fight with a bar." He favored the Agricultural Reports, and gave as a reason that the South wanted the pictures in them, "so as to know whether it had the same kind of varmints—rats, mice, and squarrels—as the North."

"Talk about Hannibal, Marlborough, Prince Eugene, Bonaparte, and Villiers! What more sublime contests in the world's history than these, where man meets man front to front, assaulting and assaulted with that terrible instrument—the sword of the tongue?" And this anticlimax of Governor Allen, of Ohio, set the Senate in good humor after an acrimonious session.

Governor Chase was once a justice of the peace. In referring jocularly to his experiences and to the careless way Senators spoke in 1850 about the Union, he gave his

first performance of the marriage ceremony: "You take this woman to be your wife?" "Yes." "And you this man to be your husband?" She looked up in astonishment. "Yes—is that all?" "That's all," said the magistrate. "It is not such an almighty affair, after all!" said the woman.

"Here Congress is called on to pay for horns and bugles and things like pot-lids which a fellow rattled together;" and this was the way the martial and Scriptural cymbal was described by a civilian, bent on economy. In the same light, a military legislator was photographed: "Clap epaulets on his shoulders, and a mustache on his lip, and he is a Lycurgus in full uniform!" "Since I have been here," said a Senator, "there have been appropriations enough for this green-house to have reproduced the Garden of Eden, all save its inhabitants." The remark produced as much merriment as a multifarious bill which once passed, "to preserve the public archives of the territory of Florida, and for the relief of John Johnson."

To stop debate and do work is often a desideratum. Once Senator Mangum proposed to send for a surgeon to have their tongues slit. Some one suggested that that would double the gabble.

In the contest of 1852, between the older and younger partisans of one of the existing parties, it was held that it was the duty of the young men to continue to hold the milk-bottle to the lips of second political childhood.

There was a discussion about a road in the District of Columbia leading to Bladensburg. It was proposed to abolish the tolls. "It was free once," said Senator Jones, of Tennessee. "That was in 1814. Let it be free now!" He referred to the ignominious retreat and

defeat of the Americans by the English at the battle of Bladensburg.

General Houston used to ridicule the Agricultural Reports. He had little scientific taste, and inveighed against bugs *ad libitum*. The Senate laughed at his lizards. His horned frogs furnished dilemmas enough for a school-man. He held that making Federal picture-books with such horrible objects created a morbid appetite for them in children!

The scientific books printed by Congress have often provoked humorous irony from the facetiously frugal mind. "This is the queerest book inside of lids," said Senator Fessenden. "Take a box of common shoe-blacking, and a brush, and a little white paper, smear it all over, and then take a pepper-box of white sand, and sprinkle it all about, and you will have as good a book as this 'Exploring Expedition.'"

An Indian tribe which had adopted habits of civilization was allowed by a Territorial bill to vote. The query was, what were such habits? Pantaloons, spurs, and a shirt-collar? That would only make the Georgia major. If, it was further suggested, the Indian only got drunk, that would approximate nearest to the highest degree of civilization! Then a grave Senator suggested the Highland usage—when the Scotch put on pantaloons and quit cattle-stealing! It was also suggested that in one Indian precinct out on the borders, where an election was held, one pair of breeches was obtained for voting purposes, and thirty-five Indians put into it!

An Ohio member, Dr. Duncan, in 1845, produced in the House a loaf of black bread. He said it was composed of sawdust and wheat bran, cemented with a small quantity of molasses. This was the bread which the

common people were to eat, in case Polk had been elected the year before. The Lacedemonian poverty thus represented in broth and black bread gave rise to much humorous discussion as well as satiric recrimination.

For shrewd Yankee and human nature commend me to some of Eli Thayer's compendious and unique utterances in 1860. The war was coming on, and the squatter-sovereignty policy in the Territories found an ingenious champion in his fresh handling. In responding to one of his opposing colleagues, he said: "Do you say the people in the distant borders are strangers to each other, and will not harmonize on voting in the Territories? Do you suppose these Yankees out there are like the Frenchman, who would not save a man from drowning because he had not been introduced to him? Does my colleague suppose that if they had no social qualities, they would not see if something could not be made out of an acquaintance?"

A member sees the vermilion hue of the decorations of the House, and, to express his sense of a hot debate, likens the color to that which makes the bull mad in Spain. Another desires the hall changed so as to reach the open air. He is reminded that he may see his constituents soon, without the necessity of extending the interior walls of the chamber. Some one once called for tellers on the Father of his Country. It was an appropriation about a statue to Washington. Mr. Corwin once likened the Speaker and his gavel to a woodpecker tapping a hollow beech-tree.

Speaking of the civil service, General Banks turned on this *jeu d'esprit:* "It is no matter whether the applicant knows how near the sun is to the earth, unless it gets so near as to scorch him on duty."

Mr. Morton wittily likened the Bourbon element of the improgressivists to the man riding in the cars backward, who never sees any thing till he has passed it.

Again, but not so wittily, the same Senator, who seldom indulged in the trifles of humor, pursued the same theme. He had consulted prose and poetry, sacred and profane. At last he draws from "Milton in his blindness" this incongruity:

> "For spirits, when they please,
> Can either sex assume, or both, so soft
> And unconfounded in their essence pure;
> Not tied or manacled with joint or limb,
> Not founded on the brittle strength of bones."

This was his conservative.

Senator Hamlin illustrated the idea better. A boy was late at school. The ground was slippery. He told his teacher that, on taking a step forward, he fell two behind. "How, then, did you get here?" "Oh," said the boy, "I turned around and went backward."

Once, in the chair, I made the mistake of saying, "Gentlemen will please go *through* the tellers." I should have said "between." It was an agreeable variation from the stereotyped form, and, from a Representative of the big, bad city, it was accounted larcenously and eminently proper, for to go "through" is to—become amenable to the criminal law.

"If we can not make speeches, let us print essays," said Judge Niblack, "which, so far as posterity goes, will be quite as efficacious."

"'Look not upon the wine when it is red,' that is," explained an exegetical member, on a tax bill, "when it has drugs in it."

"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" was once

flourished on behalf of Mr. Gideon Welles by General Nye with ludicrous effect.

"I do not object to reporters making speeches for me, but I can not feel grateful for one so silly as this; I can make such speeches myself," said Senator Howe; and the Senate seemed to agree cheerfully.

Mr. Eldridge, in debating the greenback, sent a ten-dollar note to the clerk's desk to have its famous pledge or indorsement read. Mr. Cavanaugh objected to the return of the bill. "Let it go on record," exclaimed the jocund body. "All bills offered must be filed."

General Butler was hurling invective toward the South. He was frequently interrupted. He said: "They hop up as if sitting on hot pins. Let the galled jade wince; my withers are unwrung." "But," said Governor Swan, "they ought to be." Now, "ought" implies moral obligation, and "withers" has reference to the lower part of the horse's neck, and to be unwrung is not to be twisted; so that Governor Swan's point was literally this, that there was a moral obligation existing for the equinal lower neck-bone of the Massachusetts member to remain *un*twisted. He did not intend to be so humanely decorous, yet the House enjoyed it all the same.

It was said that there were more ignorant children in the District of Columbia than in Sweden. "We should recollect," said Johnson, of California, "that they live within the range of the calcium-light of this Capitol."

"How does the gentleman get the census of Colorado for 1860?" said Mr. Taffe. It was answered, "From the official returns." "But," retorted Mr. Taffe, "there was no Colorado Territory then. How can he tell the age of a child five years before it is born?"

There used to be some discussions on art, but they were

too thin, even when sensible, to be digested here, even in a humorous aspect. Thaddeus Stevens made much fun of the female figure of Freedom when it was in the old hall, and before it decorated the dome. Senator Cowan made points on the extraordinary sculptors. He thought the Congressional idea of sculpture was that of the tailor and shoe-maker, minus the head-gear. He complained that Mr. Lincoln's bust was not handsome; but what was to be done? That sad face had great humor under its homely visor, and the artist caught both the sadness and the fun. The result was an *outré* anomaly in art. A Senator once gave his idea of art, drawn from his experience and observation, as a federal legislator and connoisseur. He thought that Powers should, in the grandeur of allegory, represent the Government in the form of a female, with a numerous offspring, all of them making mouths at their mother! It has been asserted that in some of the early Congresses the order for filling up the panels of the Rotunda, which was executed by Trumbull, was contracted for by the square foot! This was the only direction given to the artist. Painting was hired, as plowing—by the acre. Persico's statue of Columbus, on the east steps of the Capitol, seemed to a Senator to look like a stout gymnastic gambler, and the globe in his outstretched hand like a ball about to be rolled at nine-pins! Another Senator gave as the reason why he thought that one of the statuesque animals in the Capitol was a dog was that he had been told it was a dog!

A Michigan member (Mr. Conger) once instituted a comparison between the iron resources of Michigan and those of Missouri. How did he do it? By statistics? No. "Sir, the Iron Mountain in Missouri could be

placed in one of our valleys, and would scarcely act as a basement on which to span them."

"The Democrats have been turned out so long that their hair is as long as that of him who browsed of old." This was well received by both sides.

"Such a selection for an Indian superintendency," said Senator Sergeant, talking about Nevada, "would necessitate artesian wells; for if the Indian agencies are to be distributed among religious denominations without the wells, you must inaugurate a sect of dry Baptists."

A desperate penalty was that proposed by a Senator for President Johnson after impeachment. It was imprisonment during his natural life, and then to be hung till he was dead.

In naval architecture, a Senator quoted ironically, as a sample of progress, Washington Irving's craft that came into New York harbor, fifty feet wide, fifty feet long, and fifty feet deep.

General Cass once made the Senate ring with fun as he described the effect of noticing in the Senate a slanderous enemy. He gave it as a lesson to younger members. After rising to a personal explanation, and denying and disproving what all knew to be false, yet, when he went home to Michigan, what was his surprise to find the whole batch of lies fortified and proven against him by incontestable affidavits!

Talking of the fugitive disposition of some negroes, Mr. Etheridge said it must be endured, unless you invent some peculiar ligament to restrain the elasticity of their legs. Indeed, he had a volubility of witty exaggeration unequaled for its quaint expression. His similes, except when he chose to be classical, were always quizzically on the stretch. "It is as difficult to make a Northern man

like negro slavery, without he is interested in it, as to make a politician run away from a fat office." Or, "Texas is the last place to go to tamper with slaves. As well might the pious man seek happiness by folding his Christian mantle around him, and plunging into the gulf which separates Lazarus from the rich man."

Mr. Nesmith, the Indian-fighter and jocose ex-Senator from Oregon, once defined the difference between a major and a brevet major as "the same as that between a buzzard and a turkey-buzzard." The killing of a dozen brigadiers at a hotel in Washington while there was a battle at the front, by a chance stone at a dog, was his humor.

How bitterly, or how sweetly (according to his disposition), a man may turn away a disaster by pleasing pictures even of absurdity! Mr. Speaker Blaine told a story, after a disastrous election, of a nameless member who escaped the general defeat. He was serenaded. "Fellow-citizens, in the general wreck of matter and crash of worlds, it has pleased the Almighty and the American people, owing to my utter insignificance, to pass me by in the recent *cyclone!*"

Congress has had men of eccentric methods and manners in speech. Two examples: Mullins, of Tennessee, and (a man of better mold and good sense) Snapp, of Illinois. Mullins was laughed at, Snapp with, by the House. The former mixed his metaphors, the latter his language, if not his liquor. Mullins described pathetically how his mother, when down with a death wen, said to his father, "Go and fight the battles with General Jackson." The House laughed. But he struck a higher key when he exclaimed, "Gabriel will snap his resurrection gun before I vote to free rebels from disability."

John Covode was an odd member. It is said that Mr.

William J. Florence, in his famous character of Bardwell Slote, the member from Cohosh, has taken Mr. Covode as the type of his histrionic Congressman. However that may be, one thing Slote does not do which Covode did —quote Biblical history. "Solomon," said Mr. Covode, "went on taxing to beautify Jerusalem, and the result was, it bursted up the ten tribes of Israel, and left Judea and Jerusalem high and dry." Covode was known as Ahab, from his frequent and pungent references to that party. But Slote's ways, dress, and mannerisms are wonderfully like the average Congressman's; but I will not say that for his moral tone. The expressions of these half-loose public trustees are hardly to be taken as full indexes of their generous and genial character. As the quaint Sir Thomas Browne once said of his own style, "Many expressions are merely typical, and to be taken in a soft and flexible sense." Many allowances are to be made for the stormy passions of a body representing such diverse interests. Our Congress can not for that reason be, like the Italian Parliament, as dull as the lake that slumbers in the storm. No fugitive or cloistered virtue can live in such an arena, where are exhibited so much ardor and *élan*. You must meet the adversary, not in the impersonal editorial or the one-sided pulpit, not in the controversial tractate or the quiet thunder of the big quarto, but face to face. There can be no slinking, no hiding. The garland of the parliamentary race must be won through the heat and dust of active personal conflict.

In making this analysis and collation of the humors of such an arena, the writer is conscious of its meagreness. The spoken word has nothing of the immortality of the written word. It does not live a life beyond life. Tradition can not, does not, convey its impression. The very

ecstasy of its enjoyment by the orator unfits him afterward, as it unfits his reporter, to place his evanescent humors upon the same scroll with sedate thought. Still, enough has been distilled from the conduct of Parliament and Congress to show that legislative life is not made up of dull, cheerless, sunless commonplaces.

We might wish in our legislative discussions for more variety in style, and now and then for some quaintness or felicity of expression in place of the old state paper and heavy jargon. Why can not some one change the monotony of the public formula? Why must the question be always put just so, and the clerk read in a high dead level? Why should a motion to adjourn be made without the slightest regard to the inflection of the voice or the object of the motion?

I know that the hard features of our practical time forbid that eloquence whose golden zone clasps the Muses. The finest feathers have been plucked from our bird of oratory. He is fixed to the earth. There are no more apostrophes or invocations; no luscious fruit of Hesperides, or emblems of opulence under the lamp of Aladdin; no mouth dropping pearls, no golden-lipped sanctity, no harps upon the crystal battlements. Pan is dead. Nature has departed from the realm of Apollo. The pulpit itself is almost closed against these flights of fancy; but, for all this, shall there be no more oral "fervors of the hour?" Why may not even the heaviest cloud of statistics be illumined by finest lightning; or why may not good sense be uttered with witty words set to cheerful tones, accompanied with merry twinkles? Is fun to be exiled because adversity comes? Is there a better time for it than in adversity? So long as the human mind is what it is, so long will humor have its harp of a thousand

strings. Where will you find higher symbols of nature than in the dancing light and laughing waters? Have not humor and satire the sanction of Him who spake as never man spake? Were His parables humorless? Were they not modeled on the beautiful form of Oriental fable? His reproaches to the long-faced, bigoted Pharisee, were they not relished by the mass? Before His day had not Elijah touched the godless gods of Sidon with merciless irony? No such examples can be quoted to excuse irreverency. Nor can they transmute smartness into sanctity; but a hearty laugh at a happy lunge at vice is a species of jubilant virtue.

Oratory should follow the teachings of her sister art. In painting, the artist who distributes his lights and shades best shows his taste and skill when he gives relief by contrast. The dark parts of his canvas would fail of their intended effect if the light parts were darkened. Our energies as a people need the relief which the shadow does not bestow. Public speakers are not exempt from the ordinary rules of art. Our enjoyments in this life should antedate our future bliss. We have enough clouds of sorrow here. Let us fringe their dark edges with sunshine. Let us mellow and brighten them for the solace of others, if not for the joy of our own heart. Grief and melancholy are selfish. All nature calls for hilarity. To a spirit penetrated with its subtle essence "the open sky will sit upon its senses like a sapphire crown, the air will be its robe of state, the earth a throne, the sea a mighty minstrel playing before it," and no sphere in the wide range of its sympathies will be kingless. In that province of human activity in which life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the ostensible objects of guarantee—the province of statesmanship—where the collisions of

prejudice, interest, and passion are in constant debate, while there may be no need for the cap and bells of the fool or the acrobatic entertainment of the harlequin and clown, there is ever an urgency for those gifts which cheer, brighten, and bless, and which suffuse through society their soft radiance like the sweet, hallowing influences of sunset.

XXIV.

HUMORS OF THE CAMPAIGN—WEEVIL, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"Neither do I wholly condemn the little arts and devices of popularity. They facilitate the carrying of many points of moment; they keep the people together; they refresh the mind in its exertions, and they diffuse occasional gayety over the severe brow of moral freedom. Every politician ought to sacrifice to the Graces, and to join compliance with Reason."—EDMUND BURKE.

IN these concluding chapters, the purpose of this volume is still pursued, *i. e.*, to answer the question, *Quid rides?* These final chapters present two phases of our humor. In this chapter is represented that large opportunity for humor, called the stump; and in the last chapter the audience is fit, though few, for it is dedicated to a scholarly theme.

In this chapter an experience of the writer is recounted. Its purpose is to show how the monarch of the American hustings, Governor Corwin, could diffuse gayety over what Burke calls "the severe brow of moral freedom."

An agricultural State which had for years lost its wheat crop, is on the stretch of hilarity at the queer diversion of a political campaign. But where thousands laughed at Governor Corwin's hilarity, and at my anti-weevil specific for political disorders, hardly one laughed at the classical retort of a witty Massachusetts scholar applied to the same victim in a different arena, and which is the sub-

ject of my "conclusion." Yet both these illustrations of our humors teach how diverse and divergent are the fountains of our political playfulness. They serve to display the fact that our people crave the gayety of the king's jester, while they perform the solemn function of sovereignty. They tend to show as well the effective uses to which parliamentary speakers may apply the unrestrained humor of their campaign, as the trained wit of their culture.

Through nearly a quarter of a century of unremitting public speaking, the writer has had an abundance of forensic vicissitudes. Good humor has saved him often from defeat, and always from disappointment. A volume would not suffice in which to sheaf and garner these wayside frolics of the campaign. From the lumber mills of Maine to the gold hills of California; from the thickly settled wards of the metropolis to the pleasant homes of the Middle-state farmers, and amidst every variety of our mosaic population, he has found that irrepressible love of humor which swept distemper from the busy and bitter campaigns incident to our active suffrage. This spirit has "made the chalice of the big, round year run o'er with gladness." Rarely has the bitter hyssop crowned the cup. In all the memories which arise of these years, those which remain most permanently are the ludicrous accidents, situations, and characters, and the natural and acquired absurdities which gave pleasure, without stint or spite. These diffusive expositions of laughter require little more than a natural turn for acting, added to a retentive memory and some sense of logical application. They have no literature. They have involutions of meaning, which require little or no clue to follow. They have the diffusion and sparkle of burlesque

and anecdote, without the splendors of rhetoric or the raptures of inspiration. But who will deny them a place among the pyrotechnics, if not the potencies, of our free-speaking land and active age. True, the art of "stumping" is almost a lost one. The days of Gentry, Prentiss, Wise, Hamer, Hale, Douglas, John Van Buren, Lincoln, Baker, and Nye, like the days of chivalry, are gone. "Moral freedom" is now in the care of the newspaper and telegraph. But why expect popular oratory to remain? As a tradition only, it may have a nebulous memory. But if Voltaire could find all the bright stories of Canute, Charles V., Henry IV., and a hundred other sovereigns, in Athenæus and the old authors, told of the kings and princes of antiquity; if he could say of America that when Columbus discovered it every one had known of it for a long time; what ambiguity may we not expect during our next centennial period clinging to the marvelous workings of free speech and its concomitant graces during the past centennial cycle?

From a large repertoire of personal recollections, may I be permitted to add my "anti-weevil campaign?" It has been hard to select one of sufficient point and gravity to illustrate this chapter.

I had been elected to Congress in 1856, on the Buchanan ticket. But, somehow, I was a "Douglas man," though hardly a man at that time in political experience. Kansas, bleeding and what not, was rantipoled after us on our advent in Washington, in December, 1857. I was among the first, indeed the very first, to break the ice after Douglas's anti-Lecompton speech against the Kansas policy of the Administration. It was also the first speech in the new hall; but it is memorable to me for other reasons. That speech cost me much anxiety

and a couple of postmasters. The same "chop" which fed some hungry partisans *cut* off others. The attack on that speech was terrific. Points of order bristled like quills upon Shakspeare's pet porcupine. General Quitman; Bocock, of Virginia; Jones, of Tennessee; Judge Hughes, of Indiana, *et alii*, first tried to prevent my speaking at all. How I managed to get through I can hardly tell. I have a dreamy sense, while trembling like an aspen, of being recruited by the sonorous voice of General Banks and the rotund form of Humphrey Marshall. They shielded me on the points of order.

After much acrimony a compromise, called the English bill, was introduced by "Bill English," of Indiana. I voted for it. It was thought to be a safe middle course. Eheu! Then began my woes. How little they seem now, since the great events of the war! I had to run between two fires—the Buchanan Old Lines and the Douglas Young Americas. I have not bolted much since.

My woes were worse when I reached Columbus, in the summer of 1858. That I was elected that year from the capital Ohio district is to me a marvel. A youthful and unsophisticated sincerity saved me.

How I was elected is found in my little story. When the campaign began, I was met by the Republicans denouncing the English bill and all who voted for it. I was a most peculiarly blistered traitor. The repeal of the Missouri Compromise was not so hard to meet. In my agony I sought seclusion. From my father's farm, in Muskingum County, "I bid the lovely scenes at distance Hail!" My father was a farmer, and was then harvesting. He boasted about a peculiar kind of grain. A relative in a distant county had furnished a kind of wheat, not from the Mediterranean, but not unlike that

cereal. One thing, however, was sure about it—it was weevil-proof. That pest had ravaged the richest fields of the State. Licking and Scioto valleys, my own district, had suffered. Was I not then, as now, a friend of agriculture? Have I not disputed its honors with Mr. Greeley, in the farming lands of New York—city?

Attempts had been made to prevent weevil, to scare weevil, to obliterate weevil. Birds had been allowed free lunch on weevil. Every effort was in vain. The weevil became the chronic plague of Central Ohio. My own parent had found the great panacea—not a panacea exactly, but a prevention. How I leaped to it! I mentioned that I was a friend of agriculture. Millions would be saved to that occupation. It was July. The harvest had been gathered. Whereas the year before there had been dearth, through the weevil, to all the paternal acres, my father had found that the weevil had failed to prey this season in the most vulnerable spots. I said, "Good! this shall be utilized. I will not hide this wheat under a bushel." I forthwith requested my female relatives to make sacks by the hundred. I ordered several bushels of that wheat. I had labels printed:

FREE.

——— ———, *M. C.*

ANTI-WEEVIL WHEAT.

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I had, in my exultation, forgotten the postal laws. I had neglected to advise the Agricultural Department. I had the sacks filled. I directed them, miscellaneously, all over the district. What were Republicans or Democrats

to me! "Weevil or anti-weevil"—that was the question.

I was threatened with prosecution by the Federal authorities. But still the weevil-proof wheat was carried over Licking, Pickaway, and Franklin counties. The campaign waxed hot in September. A Democrat had bolted, and was to run against me. He was a fluent lawyer, and quite ready to arraign me on Lecompton and the English bill. Indeed, in our first "joint high" discussion, he did arraign me. But the gravamen of his charge was that I had violated the postal laws in sending out among the farmers a bogus kind of wheat. He harangued the people to show that it was not anti-weevil; it was full of cheat, weevil, and all sorts of unclean things. My sacks were ransacked, my wheat sifted. It was ground between the upper and nether millstones of popular opprobrium. The campaign grew hot and hotter. I became alarmed. Posters were stuck on trees, sheds, and tavern sign-posts in all the townships and towns: "Weevil! weevil! Down with the weevil candidate!" Handbills were circulated, charging me with an insidious desire to ruin the agriculture of an honest, hard-working people. Central committees issued private circulars and statistical tables, explaining the deleterious influence of weevil upon the farming interest. The staff of life was called in as a crutch to help my competitor. Orators harangued crowds, in school-houses and in town-halls, on the deleterious nature of the Congressman and weevil. The first was an enemy to Free Kansas, the second to fair agriculture. The best talent of Ohio, then full of elocutionary genius, was evoked to show the connection between Lecompton and wheat—weevil and the English bill.

My friends were in despair. Our county central com-

mittees were demoralized. Hasty meetings were called. Men unused to despair—old Jackson hickories, never uprooted in our Democratic forest by any adverse blasts—shook their heads wisely, like Burleighs; their young and sanguine candidate had spoiled the campaign. It was bad enough to be between Douglas and Buchanan, and take the fire of both, and of the Republicans also; but weevil! weevil! was too much.

I tried to explain. I tried to mention, in a meek way, that my paternal relative had tried it. Was I not a disinterested friend of that farming interest which had once elected me, and whose continued suffrage and crops were dear to my heart? But it would not do. What, in the name of Jackson, and so forth, was our candidate about when he broke the postal laws to send his atrocious wheat over the district? If it were good wheat even—if it were weevil-proof—how could the fact be proved until after the election, next year? That had not occurred to me.

All over the district, where my weevil had gone, my sacks were emptied, and bitter, vindictive, partisan opponents had filled the empty sacks with the scrapings of their barns, their barrels, and their boxes. Affidavits were procured by my friends, which stated that on a dark and rainy night two Radicals were seen going to a barn with a lantern, where they emptied my invaluable seed-wheat upon the floor, and filled the sacks with the awfulest offal. My wheat, which was proof strong as holy writ, was dishonored by trifles light as air. It was shown up to prejudiced and gaping voters as "cheat." It was worse than chaff. I will not say what these bitter partisans mixed with my unadulterated seed. I recall especially one orator. His name absorbed a quarter of

the alphabet, and he made the weevil question paramount. Was there any spot from Fallsburg to New Holland, running over two hundred miles of arable land; from the hazel-bushes of Red Brush to the corn-fields of that classic soil where Logan, "the white man's friend," did not speak what Jefferson reported—was there one man, woman, or child who had not heard the voice of that orator denouncing my weevil fraud?

But I look back with delight to those friends who exercised their faith in my agricultural rectitude. Faith is so good in the dark. As the election-day approached, this faith became more necessary. Nothing would do but I must meet my opponent, in debate, on the weevil question. It was my salvation. Before the day of debate Governor Corwin was sent for. The campaign was in his vein. He seemed to appreciate its points. He was a devotee of that

> "Goddess fair and free,
> In heaven yclept Euphrosyne—
> By men, heart-easing Mirth."

He came. He had been Governor, Senator, Secretary of the Treasury; but, most of all, had he been, and then was, the rarest of all the Buckeye humorists and orators.

First he went to Circleville. "What shall I speak about?" said he to the committee. That body, in full chorus, responded: "*Weevil.* Our member is dodging the Lecompton issue; he ignores the English bill; he seeks to defraud honest agriculture by seeking votes through weevil. Governor, hold him up to the scorn of an indignant community." Corwin liked the issue. He told me afterward that he enjoyed that campaign.

"Fellow-citizens," he began, "your member has voted on both sides of the Lecompton question. He desires you

to forget how he disliked Buchanan and deserted Douglas. He would persuade you that he is for Free Kansas, and that if the people can't vote directly for it, under the English bill they may vote it down. How does he do this?" At this pause the governor produces my anti-weevil sack. He shows the chaff, cheat, dirt, rust, and so forth, clandestinely introduced, for political effect, into my innocent sack; and with one of those wonderful grimaces and gestures, which would have made his fortune on the comic stage, he says: "Your member asks you to vote for him as a saddle-bag candidate, on both sides of Lecompton. How would he persuade you? 'Won't you take a little weevil?'" The roars of laughter among my enemies were indescribable for noise and extent.

When he went to Newark to speak in the fair-grounds, I was so audacious as to go out to hear. I fastened my horse and buggy in the woods, crept near quietly, hiding under a slouched hat, and, with a hickory-tree as a barricade, I sat on the grass in hearing distance. When I reached the grounds there were five thousand excited Republicans already assembled. There is unusual commotion in the throngs. The governor is driven up in a barouche with six white horses. On each horse, above the ear, is a flag—"*Down with the Weevil Candidate!*" Banners are borne up by the masses, amidst shouts, bearing mottoes: "For Congress, Lucius Case, the Farmers' Friend, and the Opponent of Weevil." The stand, too, is ornamented with flags. On them are various emblems and mottoes: "Bread is the Staff of Life. Democracy would Poison it with Weevil!" "Sunset has Gone Down behind a Wheat-field!" "Free Kansas and a Fair Harvest!" Quite a tumult arises on the stand as the Republican magnates rise to receive Governor Corwin.

The band strikes up "See the Conquering Hero Comes."

A chairman was appointed. I knew him well. He was my aversion. He was from Granville, a Republican township, which always gave over two hundred against me, although there were several churches and a college there, and but one tavern, where no liquor was sold except slyly. I may mention that I got some support there from a water-cure. But that chairman was my *bête noire*. He had often put questions to me about taxation and ratio of representation, though I learned that he never paid any taxes, and only represented bankruptcy. Still, he was a model of a class of politicians of the pietistic sort.

I peep around my tree to hear his opening. He says: "Fëollëow-citizens,—Before Governor Cor*wine* begins his address I desire to propëound an interrëogatory. Is there any one here in the crowd who has any of the weevil wheat sent out by our member of Congress?"

At this point a dozen sacks are pitched into the stand. I trembled for my reputation. "A *com*mittee is sitting on the hind eend of this stand, examinin' into the genooineness of this new-fangled wheat. [Cheers.] We will unmask this demagogue who sends it out. He pretends to be the farmers' friend. He is the enemy of their hëomes and hëarths. He would crawl, like the animiles of Holy Writ, into the very kneading-troughs of the honest people he has betrayed on the Lecompton bill. [Cheers.] Is the *com*mittee ready to report?"

At this point the committee approach the front of the stand. They are led by a long, gangling, Ichabod Crane sort of person, with a highly nasal twang and the sing-song of exhortation. Before he begins, the string band, consisting of three fiddles, a fife, and a tenor-drum, strikes

up "The Girl I Left Behind Me." I sympathize with the tune and the girl; but the music does not soften the features of that chairman. He advises the people thus: "Mr. Cheerman and Fellow-citizens,—The committee appinted to examine this wheat have concläuded their labors, and are unanimously of opinion there's weevil in it." [Cheers.] After which a stray Democrat from Newton township, a little lively on the subject of grain and its juices, proposed to whip the crowd. He was for "Weevil and the Constitution, and could lam any 'Abolish' in that meeting."

It is needless to say how the meeting treated this friend, and Governor Corwin that report. He began, as he said, seriously on Ceres. The joke was too classical. He pictures the condition of Kansas—the blight of slavery on its virgin soil, the men of blood and crime—and rises to his climax at every turn: "and for these grievances your Congressman proposes—what? To devastate your fair fields with weevil." [Cheers.]

But I can not dwell on this phase of the campaign. I had to meet my competitor. When I was carried off the stand by an enthusiastic and partial crowd, the last I heard him say, in his closing quarter of an hour, were the words, "WEEVIL, *weevil*, weevil;" while hurtling through the air, at the heads of speaker, moderator, and committees, from the hands of indignant Democrats, were innumerable sacks of weevil. I learned afterward that a census of that weevil shower was taken, and some fifty more sacks than I had ever sent forth were miraculously taken up that day.

This discussion had changed the tide. I gave an honest account to the people of that wheat. I begged to allow the genuine article one year to grow. I ventured to

predict that fields, so often devastated by this insect enemy of agriculture would fructify again. I explained that it was a larva of the pentamerous beetles of the tribe trichoptera. This was satisfactory. I described the snout of the animal—how it digs into the innocent grain, and how the grubs burrow, when hatched, and consume the seed. Placing my hand upon my vest, I told how my heart yearned to eradicate this enemy of agriculture from the wheat-field. "What!" I exclaimed, "when I find a class of wheat impervious to these enemies of your daily bread, am I to keep it a secret? Never! Let Kansas be blighted, and be bled with civil conflict, but save, oh save, the fruitful fields of lovely Licking! Why, fellow-citizens, the very woodpeckers are the enemy of this your enemy. The red oriole and the blackbird [laughter] alike detest and destroy it. I would rather vote for a woodpecker than for a man who ridicules my feeble attempt to stay the ravages of this insectivorous plague! Let us raise, on our banners and in our voices, the inspiring battle-cry, "Down with Weevil, and up with Democracy!"

It is needless to say that this shibboleth was caught up. Every Democratic meeting and procession was made resonant with the anti-weevil cry. Every hickory pole, rising above a sea of Democratic heads from a hickory wagon in a Democratic procession, was surmounted by a sack, inscribed with the name of an "Anti-weevil candidate for Congress," and the motto of "Squatter Sovereignty, and Good Crops."

I was elected. I doubled my former majority. The next year proved me to be a friend of agriculture. My wheat, when genuine, was free from the insect. Millions have been saved to those counties. That wheat is yet grown. Republicans clamored for it as children for Mrs.

Winslow's sirup; but it took several seasons before Democrats would allow their radical neighbors to have even seed-wheat from my brand.

On my return from Congress, in 1859, after harvest, I addressed a meeting, and boldly put this question: "If my anti-weevil wheat has proved the salvation of your grain harvests, so have my anti-Lecompton votes proved the salvation of Kansas. Is there any one here who will deny that wheat to be weevil-proof? If so, let him stand up." A fellow, dressed in a wamus, from the head waters of Black Lick, cried out: "Not only weevil-proof, but must-proof, cheat-proof, and darn my boots if it isn't hog-proof too! My hogs got into the field, and would neither eat nor root!"

XXV.

CLASSIC HUMOR—A HOMERIC STUDY.

. "When Thersites leads the Greeks, Troy does not place Hector on the walls."

THIS sarcasm, substantially, has twice been used in Congress, and on each occasion by Massachusetts members. Once when Mr. Caleb Cushing made his first speech, and when he was fiercely assailed by "Old Ben Hardin," of Kentucky, it was used in defense of Massachusetts. The report of that debate is meagre. We are indebted to Mr. Savage, in his "Living Representtive Men," for this account of the effect of the sarcasm: "Mr. Cushing, referring to Mr. Hardin's habit of quoting to the House from Homer, begged leave to refer to that celebrated author for an illustration apropos to the occasion. He regretted to observe upon that floor a disputant who, with neither the courage of Achilles for the combat, nor the wisdom of Ulysses for the council, yet, with the gray hairs of Nestor on his head, condescended to perpetually play the part of the snarling Thersites! The whole House broke out in a burst of admiration at this closing sally of the young orator, while the galleries sent up a loud shout of applause, accompanied with clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs by the ladies."

In the form first given, it was used again, forty years afterward. It came from the caustic tongue of another

Massachusetts member, in reply to a New York member. On each occasion the victim of the polished poniard had more than intimated that some other Massachusetts member should step to the front to defend the State. The implication, of course, was that the member then upon the floor was a subordinate. His *amour propre* and legislative parity being thus challenged, the reply was not only proper and parliamentary, but pungent and punitory. That is to say, it *was* this: on the supposition, *first*, that Thersites was not, either by character or position, fit to make the assault upon Troy; and if he were, that then there was no necessity for Troy to place her best man forward; and, *second*, that the member from Kentucky—"Ben Hardin"—and the member from New York—*nominis umbra* (out of modesty)—were in a similar case with Thersites, the characterless and blatant Argive.

My purpose now is to vindicate Thersites, not to question the propriety of the witticism. Wit is reckless of moral consequences. All it endeavors is to make the victim wince, and thus to crown the victor. In this case this result was reached. The salt was Attic, in a double sense. Whether the Bardstown orator or the New York member was a proper object to be thus pickled, is not the "Homeric study" proposed. Kentucky is, or was, proud of her eloquent and humorous son. Although born in Pennsylvania, his public life of a quarter of a century, beginning with the close of the last war with England, and ending in 1837, is as much a part of Kentucky pride as the blue grass of her "sweet pastures," or the Bourbon of her "still waters." It would be neither pertinent nor necessary to vindicate his fame.

Nor would it be within the narrow compass of this Ho-

meric study to remark upon the wonderful coincidence of two Massachusetts members using the same elegant and classic thrust upon a similar occasion, with such an intervention of time. Such coincidences are easily accounted for, without the elder Weller's experience, and without assigning plagiarism. The last member may have heard of the first member's repartee; but should this estop him from repeating it, if the occasion were fit? Such coincidences are not rare. At another time, about the close of our civil war, one more marvelous happened. While Mr. Dawes, in the House, was quoting the famous verse about the lion roaring in the lobby, at the identical moment the lamented Sumner was applying the same jingle to another matter in the Senate.

Nor would it change the flavor or destroy the virtue of the Homeric allusion, which I have quoted—if one should show Thersites to be the very cream of goodness, the soul of honor, the bravest of heroes—*facile princeps* among the kings whose boats were by the shore, and whose myrmidons were beleaguering Troy. Admit that the general reputation of Thersites was different—that he was not a turbulent brawler, or a misshapen buffoon—still the poignancy remains. It is just as damaging. It will remain so, whether the reputation of Thersites be redeemed or not.

After so many centuries, this task of redemption would seem difficult; and if accomplished, *cui bono?* Besides, it may be said that Thersites was only a figment of the Homeric imagination. But if scholars will continue to discuss the peculiarities of Hamlet and Gobbo, Pickwick and Ralph Nickleby; if commentators will work to show the mental qualities and moral motives of Lady Macbeth and Becky Sharp, creatures of the fancy, so as the better

to elucidate them, and in the light of their authors to draw other and nicer lessons—why may we not, even at this late day, do justice to Homer by rescuing Thersites from his unpleasant fame? Nero had friends who placed immortelles on his tomb. Examine history, and you will learn from Tacitus that Nero did not fiddle when Rome was burning; because there were then no fiddles; and because on that occasion he was singing a song at his theatre, to glorify Bacchus and the vine, with a roistering company. But when the fire raged, and the people were starving and homeless, Nero promptly ordered grain from all Italy, and opened his extensive gardens to the destitute. If Nero has his vindication, why not Thersites?

Besides, has not an astute lawyer shown that Judas Iscariot was not so arch a traitor as he is represented? Was he not shown to have so much conscience and goodness, that he went out and hanged himself? Did he not turn the thirty pieces of silver over to a good object?

Many illustrations are to be found showing that the devil himself is not so black as he is painted, if indeed he is black at all; nay, if indeed he is a personage at all. Burns defended him, and rather liked to imitate some of his friskiness.

Have not our ideas of history been rudely overthrown of late years? Scholarly iconoclasts have shown Herodotus to be, not the father of history, but the father of lies! Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf are reduced to myths. Wilhelm Tell and his compatriots are in peril of losing their monuments even amidst their grand mountains. For all that we know, the little hatchet—not to speak of Washington and his juvenile veracity—may, before another centennial, vanish from the American memory. Facts are *not* stubborn things. Time wears out

even adamant; and that which was thought perennial proves to be hardly ennial, or hebdomadal, or ephemeral.

What endless disputes has the "Iliad" aroused! They date from the time when Solon, Pisistratus, and Hipparchus caused it to be re-edited, and Aristotle wrote learnedly upon its unities. From the time of the Alexandrian critics, who planted their obellus or dagger (†) into the fracas, down to the time when the German scholar, Wolf, set all Germany by the ears over his hypothesis, the question whether Homer was an abstraction or a person, or several persons, with as many birthplaces, has been a theme for the doubters. De Quincey opened his ornate discussion with likening the inquiry to that for the dark fountains of the Nile. It is not yet settled when Homer sung. It is almost as indefinite as Professor Clifford's cosmogony as to how long the earth has existed, which he reckons at one hundred millions or two hundred millions of years! It is agreed of Homer that he lived somewhere between Abraham and Solomon, if he lived at all. He had sixteen written lives after death—all but two have been reduced to tradition; and these two were proven to be forgeries. Whether his blindness was or was not a trick to catch pennies and assist his recitations, as he went levanting about the Mediterranean with his hurdy-gurdy; whether he was really blind or not; or whether it was only a blind to say he was; whether he ever lived; and, if not, whether he ever died; and, if he died, whether of vexation because he could not answer the famous conundrum of the fishermen connected with his name—these problems have already stirred the dialectics of all ages, from Plutarch to Bryant. It remains yet to be settled, the terrible riddle, "Is Homer a hum, and the Iliad a hoax?" However settled, it does not deter me from vin-

dicating Thersites, especially when answering the question, *Quid rides?* On any hypothesis, however, as to the epic — whether, like the Shakspearian drama, it is the work of one or of many minds—there may be some things alleged as sure: *First*, that he was born early, that is, say, a thousand years or so before Christ; or, at least, that his poems were. *Second*, that the times were not so very bad as to have corrupted the language by luxury, or enriched it by multiplying conditions of progress. *Third*, that the Ionic dialect, in which he composed, was a fit garment for the external beauty which sun and sky, land and sea, embroidered to his eye, provided he had an eye. *Fourth*, that when he wandered about the Ægean, or into Asia Minor, inspecting the walls of Troy and the shores of the Hellespont; ascended the Nile, or voyaged into Italy and Sicily—he learned, like Socrates, from the people, and sympathized with them; that he knew the slang of the sailors and the ropes of the ship; and, that he never intended to elevate the meannesses of human nature so as to dignify kingcraft and pillage; in fine, that he knew that Agamemnon was a swell, Achilles a debauchee, Paris a puppy, Ulysses a fraud, and the lazy thieves and spoilers who lay loosely around Troy for over nine years were just what Mr. Bryant, in his preface, calls the gods who prompted and directed them—"debauched, mercenary, rapacious, and cruel; dwelling in a world in which the rules of right and the maxims necessary to the well-being of human society find no recognition." It is for this reason that Plato ruled out of his ideal republic the literature which glorified such mock heroes.

If, then, Homer existed, and was the good man and great genius we love to believe, and these various conditions attach to his muse, he had a conscious purpose in

constructing out of the lyric elements of Grecian filibustering, a grand moral.

Has it not, then, occurred to the reader that his epic, when read between the lines, is a recondite and severe satire on the swash-buckler and the tyrant? May it not be reasonably inferred, if that be true, that his real hero is the martyr who suffered at the hands of these so-called heroes? If so, Thersites is vindicated.

Why, it was not till lately that it was ascertained that Sir Thomas More's "Utopia" was the keen irony of a philosophic wit upon contemporaneous governments. Homer's pictures of the wrathful Achilles, the treacherous Paris, the truce-breaking Pandarus, and the general batch of brigadiers who were in that Trojan unpleasantness, were meaningless in morality, unless they were intended to disgust the ingenuous Grecian youth with the treacheries and atrocities, rascalities and debaucheries, incident to war, and especially to that war. In every book of his epic, Homer takes care to show these as the salient attributes of his heroes. When he leaves these braggart bullies and insignificant sovereigns, to paint the sweet offices of friendship and the gentle graces of domestic love, as in the cases of Patroclus and Andromache, did he not endeavor by contrast to woo the wild, roving spirit of young Greece to the calm and ennobling pursuits of culture and peace? But how seldom does he grace his epic with these inspiring scenes of contented virtue! All through the poem are evidences that he meant to depict the generally received heroes as swindlers, quacks, and boasters. Even their protecting divinities partake of the same qualities. The most sacred scenes illustrate this view. The very funeral rites furnish proof of their low-born cunning, and despicable hy-

pocrisy, which Homer, for a wise purpose, holds up to the scorn of all countries, and especially of Greece. Illustrations are plentiful; as, for instance, in the twenty-third book, a mule is offered for the best boxer. One of the pugilists stands forth, and in the true Bowery patois exclaims (Derby's translation, vol. ii., page 400), "I mean to pound his flesh and smash his bones!" His rival puts on his bull's-hide gauntlets and leaps into the "centre of the ring" with the celerity of Yankee Sullivan. Then commences the "clattering of each other's jaws," until one is dragged out spitting forth clotted gore. This is a pretty funeral rite dedicated to friendship! Is it not a satire on the "fistic art?" Was it not intended for the "half man" to laugh at?

There is no pretense to fair play by these Greeks in their "little games" in honor of the dead. Call that fair play in wrestling, when wily Ulysses trips up Ajax, "by locking his leg around and striking sharp upon the hollow of the knee," so as to upset the giant! This is what is called, in the West, the grape-vine twist. It is not reckoned the fair thing. In the race, when Minerva sees that her favorite is behind, this mean and unseen female trips up the awkward Ajax, and allows her champion to carry off the "pewter mug." And into what a predicament he makes Ajax fall. Even the *opéra bouffe* of the French, which has seized on this epic for its richest material of superlative travestie, could not, by any trick of the stage, place Ajax in the degrading "fix" which Homer arranges for him. One should take refuge in the Greek text to describe it, though Mr. Bryant faithfully says:

> "Ajax, in running, slipped and fell—the work
> Of Pallas—where in heaps the refuse lay
> From entrails of the bellowing oxen slain."

His mouth and nostrils are full of filth, and his only reference to the unpleasant transaction is that Minerva acted like a mother toward her pet, Ulysses. And the Greeks laughed. This was at a funeral!

Even the fight between Hector and Achilles is a pluckless encounter. No one nowadays would call it heroic. Hector is afraid to go inside the walls. He fears reproach; then he will risk it. But as soon as he perceives Achilles coming, all ablaze in his armor, he flees terror-stricken, and is hunted three times around the walls, making hippodrome time. The very washer-women at their stone troughs laugh at the spectacle. At last he is brought to bay, but only by a *ruse* of one of the good goddesses, whose favorite he is, and who, personating a brother, persuades Hector to stand, and he will be succored. But, finally, Achilles corners him—Achilles, who is so mad, according to Derby's translation, that he wants to tear and eat him. Then the Greeks gather around and begin to pierce anew the dead man, as I have seen Spanish boys in the bull-ring stick their javelins into the corpse of the gallant bull, or like Falstaff killing anew the departed Hotspur! Then this heroic Achilles, making holes in the ankles of the dead man, ties him to his chariot, and, with a ferocity worse than that of the meanest Modoc, hauls him around the walls eleven times, till his mother tears her hair and his father groans. This is the noble art of war!

What other object *could* a man so well educated and traveled as Homer have had in writing these things, except that of Cervantes, who depictured Don Quixote and his class so as to make chivalry ridiculous and odious? What other object besides, unless to glorify our favorite Thersites to future ages for his good sense in ridiculing

such fraudulent and brutal monsters? Nor should we fail to remember that it was this same Achilles who kills Thersites. And for what? Thersites makes fun of this brute because he mawkishly wept over a big, strapping Amazon, called Penthesilea, whom Achilles himself had slain! Though this is not well authenticated, it is not at all unlikely. The remarks made by the dying Thersites on this lamentable occasion, if it occurred, are not recorded; but we can well imagine them. Doubtless he had the best of the talk; and there being no rational answer, there was but one reply—a brass knuckle over the old man's bald head! It was fit that Thersites should die by such a hand in the cause of free speech. "Ferocious barbarian at best," Mr. Bryant well calls Achilles. Did he not want his own people slain by thousands till they learned to despise Agamemnon? Why this? Because the latter had stolen his young lady. Besides, did he not capture twelve Trojan youths—this Achilles—to cut their throats at the funeral of Patroclus—a cold-blooded, disgusting act, only paralleled by certain Cuban captain-generals of our day? If Thersites is not the true hero of Homer, then Achilles ought not to be.

Many years ago, an English lawyer published an article in *Blackwood* to prove that the "Iliad" involved only legal merits. He argues the case of Menelaus *vs.* Paris, and the proper practice. He contrasts the remedy of Greece with that of England in such cases. Going to the proper subject of the poem, he argued, further, that the wrath of Achilles was the main point of law. As that wrath sprung from what Achilles considered an unfair division of the loot taken in one of the Grecian bumming expeditions; and as part of this plunder was an assortment of ladies; and as, in the division, Chryseis

is taken by Agamemnon, the rest being passed around among these virtuous heroes; and, further, as, on a divine intimation, Agamemnon gives up Chryseis to her father, no ransom being asked—the question mooted is, What shall Agamemnon have for suffering that loss? It is not inquired how useful the lady was; what work she performed; but, if Agamemnon suffered for the common weal, ought not that weal to pay him *pro ratâ?* If so, what rate? Again, if the lady caused the trouble, and her release allayed it, may it not be concluded that the wrath which is at the foundation of the epic is a huge legal joke? When Achilles calls the Big King insolent and timid, "a dog in forehead, and in heart a deer," it seems as if the very genius of jurisprudence was inverted in order to make war ludicrous.

If, then, the Homeric incidents are to be tried by legal rules and formulæ, what would be the verdict in a case of slander brought by Thersites against Ulysses for his scandalous utterances in the second book? Or suppose Agamemnon had sued Thersites for libel in asserting that he had illegally and surreptitiously heaped up gold and kept damsels in his tent—could not Thersites have given the truth in evidence, by way of justification?

But it may be urged that Homer is not qualified by his serious vocation as a royal minstrel, singing of grand and patriotic events, to make comedy out the fallible human wrath and immoral divine intervention which dignify the epic. Whoever thus argues, does not know the blind old bard of Scio. Was there ever since—saving Cervantes—such mock heroism, as he sings in his "Batrachomyomachia?" The vanquished frogs and the victor mice call for no less an inspiration than Helicon. Mars, too, is invoked. Destiny and Divinity play their

parts. Their armor is prepared with minute fidelity to that of the epic heroes. Heralds announce the opening hostilities. It is a fight of needles against bulrushes. The Gnats sound the onset, and Jove thunders. The fight thickens. Extermination threatens the whole Frog race. Olympus shakes, but kind Heaven sends the Crabs as allies to the Frogs. Gatling guns could not be more effective. Off go tail, head, and feet from the whiskered cuirassiers who make a Bull Run of the day! A race ensues, and a race is saved!

The genius which thus ridicules the deities and heroes of that early day must have been comically inclined; and doubtless the same genius had a still profounder conceit of comedy, in his pictures of the epic characters of the "Iliad." Thersites is his most genuine character; all the rest are as frogs, mice, and crabs—created for the healthy laughter of the philosophic and fun-loving Greeks!

Whom, in all that group of quarrelsome and greedy Greeks, does Homer choose to give the moral lesson to such mean monsters? Thersites. Who is it that was abused and knocked down by the sham hero of the "Iliad?" Thersites. Who is it that had the courage to tell the thieving, adulterous, long-haired Hellenes, who put on royal airs, with their few Poinses, Bardolphs, and Pistols, as retainers, the simple truth of their vagabond and inglorious lives? Thersites. Who was the just though conical-headed orator that taunted this scurvy set with their cowardice in "wanting to go home" to avoid the fight, and who proposed himself, when they left, to take the business in hand? Thersites. Who is it—? But I anticipate. If any one would ascertain the valiant and just merits of our outspoken friend Thersites, let him read unprejudiced the remarks of that gentleman, and then con the list of

the Greeks at the end of the second book, who at one moment applauded, and the next buffeted him. Some allowance may be made for the absenteeism of these disreputable Greeks. They had been away from home quite a long time. Telegraphs and postal cards were not then in vogue. Steamers did not ply as now amidst the isles of Greece. These marauders had been lying around Troy, feeding on spoils for nine long years, and when at last they were aroused with a prospect of a row or a return home—Homer well likens them to tribes of "geese, cranes, and long-necked swans" disporting and swarming into Scamander's plain. A pretty picture of a heroic crowd! But to the catalogue itself! We have had lists of voting repeaters, and Federal inspectors in our big cities; we have had rolls of members of the Legislature, but such a list of bruisers and adventurers never was enrolled before. Was it not done for a purpose? Had Homer no idea of the lesson he was teaching? There was Agamemnon. He leads. Homer likens him to a big-chested bull. Then we have one Astyoche, who insulted a bashful maiden in the upper palace rooms; Tlepolemus, who had slain his dear old uncle whom he loved; and Achilles himself, who was sulking in his ship because some one had coaxed away his maiden—a fair-haired young girl whom he had stolen from Lyrnessus. One Philoctetes is mentioned, who started out with seven ships, each about as big as a yawl; but he was absent on the sick-list. Homer says that his soldiers had deserted him at Lemnos, "*snake bit*," *i. e.*, likely that he had the *delirium tremens*, though the original Greek is not very clear on this point.

This is a sample of the noble array to protect which gods and goddesses were hovering about on azure wings

and without much toilet on their backs. Captain Jack and Shacknasty Jim rise in the comparison above these Hellenic ragamuffins; and yet these are the rascally battalions who "smiled" (as Mr. Bryant translates it), *i. e.*, took a cocktail, doubtless to the health of Ulysses, because that oily old vagabond and hypocrite silenced the honest indignation of Thersites with his club. Lord Derby calls the club, by a pleasant euphemism, a golden sceptre! These are the riff-raff who applaud when the poor but respectable hunchback is belabored over the shoulders till a bloody welt rises where this royal shillalah fell! If there were nothing else to ennoble Thersites, we might be content with his manner of receiving this cowardly and vulgar attack of Ulysses. Not satisfied with calling Thersites bad names, such as "garrulous wretch," nor with sneering at him for presuming to dispute with kings, this wily old toady and aristocrat, Ulysses, threatens to strip off his "cloak and tunic, and whatever else covers his carcass," and send him forth howling. If he don't—then—then—Telemachus is not his son, etc. Not content with using language not tolerable in a dance-house or fish-market, he, with his loaded club, knocks down this lame, bald-headed old gentleman, Thersites; and for what? What had Thersites been doing, and what saying? Nothing more than is said every day in some of our independent newspapers, when speaking of the "cormorants of corruption." Homer quietly gives us the facts. After Agamemnon proposed to desert the war, all kept their seats but one. This one was wont to seek strife with kings. He was a Greek Puritan with an overflowing humor, and thus he is described:

"All others took their seats, and kept their place.
Thersites only, clamorous of tongue,

Kept brawling. He, with many insolent words,
Was wont to seek unseemly strife with kings,
Uttering whate'er it seemed to him might move
The Greeks to laughter. Of the multitude
Who came to Ilium, none so base as he—
Squint-eyed, with one lame foot, and on his back
A lump, and shoulders curving toward the chest;
His head was sharp, and over it the hairs
Were thinly scattered. Hateful to the chiefs,
Achilles and Ulysses, he would oft
Revile them. He to Agamemnon now
Called, with shrill voice and taunting words. The Greeks
Heard him impatiently, with strong disgust
And vehement anger; yet he shouted still
To Agamemnon, and kept railing on."*

With shrill voice and taunting tone, and in spite of interruptions from impatient members of the council, he, with a pertinacity inspired by a fearless heart and a just cause, reminds the pompous king that he, the king, has already had the best of the war-spoils. He asserts that heaps of gold and chosen damsels fill Agamemnon's tent. Did any one deny the charge? Although Ulysses admitted it, he only tried to parry it. He confessed, and avoided. "You hanker for more," said Thersites, "more gold from ransomed youths," and more maidens for thy idle hours, as in the text:

"Some maiden, whom thou mayst detain apart."

Not a Greek denied this charge. The camp was full of girls, working worsted, apparently, and the truth had to come out, damaging as it was, to the princely and heroic character. When Homer thus selects Thersites to do this unpleasant duty, he knew his man; and if Thersites,

* Bryant's translation of Homer, book ii., line 210, *et seq.*

or others like him, had had the courage to do more of it, Helen and her plunder would not have remained, to the end of the twenty-fourth book, in Troy.

Were there more of this humor in our modern councils, there would be heartier commendation of laughter, as a mode of reforming abuses.

Then, on these data, Thersites began to taunt them with being women—not Greeks, but Greeklings—unworthy of their fame and name. Was he not justified? It was for this free speech against these libertines and pillagers that this honest debater was incontinently floored with the gavel or mace of Ulysses. It was for this plain talk that this noble old man writhed in pain, and, as we are pained to learn, dropped buckets of tears from his lachrymal ducts. If from such a fountain the truth and tears flow to preserve the honor of a nation, let him be welcome! Then the thesis—why we laugh—would have a more significant and rational discussion. But let me not moralize. The tears he shed, perhaps, were tears of sorrow and chagrin that he had failed to recall the recreants to duty; or, perhaps, his ducts were a little weak; or, it may be, they were tears which large laughter sometimes sheds, when a good point is made so effective that the adversary is flustered, and, to rebut it, uses a knock-down argument, with the violence of an irrational brute. Ah, Thersites! buffeted of Greeks, scorned of kings, abused by the ages, mangled by translators, laughed at in Congress, your day has come! Your vindication draws nigh! I thank the immortals that it is permitted to me to see into that squint eye, and take its spirit "straight;" that though to the Cambridge sophomore your shoulders curve too much to your breast, and your hump be somewhat too apparent,

your character is yet rectilinear, and your pluck had no ungainly vertebræ; that though you could not boast of the ample chest of Agamemnon, nor the loins of Mars, your chest was not full of ill-gotten treasure, nor your loins girt with the wages of unrighteousness; that though unfortunately one foot was lame, your understanding was doubly correct; that though your head was sharp, yet, after all, it was "level;" and though your hairs were few and short, you were not one of the "curled darlings" of a corrupt court.

Once more, O goddess who sung the wrath of Peleus's son, oblige me by sweeping away the host of braggart knaves, that this shrill-voiced, tearful, and honest, though deformed, gentleman may take his place as the one good, one fair, one beautiful, in the Pantheon of Fame! When Thersites leads the Greeks, if Troy does not put a better than Hector on the walls, all the worse for Troy!

If, then, it be true, as Pope says, that the speeches in the "Iliad" are to be considered as flowing from the characters; and if, moreover, the infelicity of those ages was the spirit of revenge and cruelty, rapine and robbery; and if Thersites is the only character who declaimed against them, is he not the only hero for us to honor under our new lights as we approach the Golden Age? Suppose Pope and all the translators make Ulysses call him

> "A factious monster born to vex the state,"

what sort of a state did he vex? Bryant answers in his translation, when he makes Ulysses say that

> "We, the Greeks,
> Can not be all supreme in power. The rule
> Of the many is not well."

Then Pope, again, in his translation makes Ulysses charge Thersites with "wrangling talents formed for foul debate." We can judge whether he was thus guilty by his remarks. He told too much truth. In our modern day, he would have been cashiered and sent home, or there would have been a requisition, without habeas corpus, for his ungainly body; or he would have lost the liberty of unlicensed criticism upon their Hellenic majesties.

Again, Ulysses taunts Thersites with not doing so much fighting as upbraiding. But this is only the assertion of a vexed and discomfited controversialist. He more than hints that while others gave presents to Agamemnon, Thersites gave none, and was not good enough to receive any. Now we see what made Ulysses so pugnacious on the poor, weak humpback. We come to the real meaning of the blow Thersites received; for had not this truthful spokesman said,

> "With all the wealth our wars, our blood, bestow,
> Thy tents are crowded, and thy chests o'erflow."

Darest thou repeat that accusation, thou reviler of the god-protected and heaven-descended? Did he quail? Never. We have the best translation, which affirms that he charged home on the kingly rogue who had plagued the people with his pride and punished them with his lust; and then the blow fell!

Some translators make Thersites only a "promiscuous" talker, and tenderly refer to the "good gifts" which were merited by the kings before given. Others call him a ribald, blurting rascal, with a haughty spirit; but the original text is not so dim, nor our eyes so blind, but that we can see that Thersites spoke for the plun-

dered masses against the prerogatived and rapacious few. He saw no glory in wars which only helped the leaders to damsels and dalliance, gold and greatness. He did not believe in the right divine of kings to govern wrong, or embezzle goods. Wherever there has been an itching palm like that of Cassius, or an embezzling sutler or commissary, the same ridicule and scorn appear, to answer the query, "Why should we not laugh?"

Wishing to leave no stone unturned to vindicate our hero, and knowing the large experience of Lord Derby as a statesman and scholar, I sought his text, to know whether he had, with nicer heed, caught the inner meaning and exquisite irony of this grand epic. We thought that Lord Stanley, the Rupert of debate, would know what Homer meant by this character of Thersites. But he does not guess the ironic genius of this man of "unmeasured words." He admits that, like a good stump-speaker, Thersites could "move the crowd to laughter;" but he does not perceive the exact rationalia of laughing at kings and their coffers. Thersites, railing at Ulysses and louder still at Agamemnon, the chief, shows at least that he struck high; and Lord Derby well translates it; but when he asserts that Agamemnon only pocketed brass and not gold, he is rather too tender on the "spoils" question toward his conservative and rural friends. The weight of authority is in favor of the gold theory. However, the Greek words are, *γέρα πεσσέμεν*, which mean to amass booty. That will answer every purpose. Such amassing, we regret to observe, did not stop three thousand years ago, when Troy fell. We read in the last of Jeremiah that Nebuzar-adan took in wars, vessels of gold, and vessels of silver, and made a good thing out of war generally; and history and war but re-

peat themselves. If there is one thing Homer meant to teach the Greeks by this episode, it is the heinousness of war, which aggrandizes wealth at the expense of the state. That lesson is for all time. Thersites is the only medium in the "Iliad" brave enough to teach it.

Mr. Bryant observes that it is a sort of "poetic finery" when so many dazzling epithets are applied by Homer to these heroes of the great epic. It is extended to fill out a line or give it a sonorous termination. Every one is either knightly, magnanimous, or godlike; or swift-footed, or beamy-crested, or, like Rarey, a horse-tamer! On the theory that Thersites was the favorite of Homer, may not the poet have intended to make fun by these well-sounding or hexametrous epithets applied to these inflated personages? May it not be a part of that subtle Cervantian irony which was intended to degrade the pursuit of arms, and the rather to attract and persuade men to the virtues and victories, not so renowned, of peace?

The very lame and impotent conclusion of the poem and the war shows that the epic is a satire on physical combat. Who was hurt? The innocent mostly. Paris, the robber and adulterer, was protected by the people of Troy, who shared his fate. Like our late war with Great Britain, this Trojan war ended without even a treaty about the actual *casus belli*. The Greeks did not get Helen, after all; and Helen showed her good sense by remaining, where she had been for twenty years, among the Trojans. Hector, the best of these valiant warriors, is slain; and there is no moral, except that right is overcome by violence, and injustice is aided by the immortals to victory. The "true grandeur of nations," which Homer must have observed before Mr.

Sumner spoke his oration, is taught to reside in the safety of concord.

The early Grecian and Roman orators, who deprecated wars, and held that there was no peace that was not honorable, and no war not dishonorable, must have understood Homer, from whom they drew so much, to have written in this ironic vein.

"Fain would I offer my tribute," says Mr. Sumner, "to the Father of Poetry, standing with harp of immortal memory on the misty mountain-top of distant antiquity." Well, why did he not? Because the "Iliad" breathed the breath of war. Had he but read Homer rightly, and appreciated Thersites as the real hero, he would not have withheld his tribute.

The epic is defined by Bossu to be a discourse invented by art, to form the manners, by instructive allegory, which is related in verse, after a probable, diverting, and surprising manner. The unity of the "Iliad" is not the unity of mere time before Troy, but the moral unity of many states in one, *E Pluribus Unum*. Hence its political morality and lesson. Divided at home, the Greeks were united, but only apparently so, abroad. To make them more harmonious, Homer shows that "the anger of Achilles was pernicious by occasioning discord between that hero and Agamemnon;" and hence the necessity of accord. If this were the only epical and ethical lesson, the poem would indeed be but a foolish fable, a futile phantom. But the epic should be moral in the highest sense. The divinities should appear divine; the heroes as "only not divine;" the colloquy should be elevated; and it should come with emphasis from a great teacher. Now, Homer was not a shadowy symbol, whoever may have put him together. Whether, as De Quincey says,

there is but one old, hazy, golden Homer that looms upon us so venerably through the mist of centuries, or a vast reverberation of little silver Homers that twinkle up and down the world, it is certain that there was a superb morality lifting this epic into immortal exaltation. Whoever is the author, he, she, or it; whether by Chorizontes, Rhapsodoi, or Homeridæ, or by whomsoever collated, sung, and arranged; whether by Lycurgus, Solon, or the Alexandrine librarians; whatever his name means in the original, whether it be a Delphic or prophetic name indicating his fate, or a hostage, or a blind man, or a packer of trunks (carpet-bagger), one thing may be defiantly asserted, that the Homeric characters had a meaning in their essence depending on the character of the mind which is applied to them. No one can pretend that the author or authors had not a sympathetic, lofty, human soul; and if that be true, there is a larger moral in his song than in the mere choleric outbursts of his hero and the political unities of the state. He meant to teach the dangers of human passion and warlike feuds. Anger in Achilles, dissimulation in Ulysses, meekness in Æneas, are of no moment, unless they teach the litany, "That it may please Thee to give all nations unity, peace, concord." The epic is, then, the foundation of international law, as well as of worldly and world-wide prosperity. Who in the epic rises in such a "probable, diverting, and surprising manner" to the height of this great argument, like Thersites? Does he not answer, in the highest sense, for all mankind, including America, the question of my dissertations: "Why should we not laugh?"

When an English general called the art of war "damnable;" when Napoleon called war the trade of barbarians; when an American officer, in battle, wrote on a

slate the dying words, "Give them hell!" they were anticipated by the great teacher, Homer, and our favorite Thersites; for of all the scourges—earthquake, famine, and plague, fire, epizoöty, and trichina included—is there in history so appalling a calamity as war? It includes all vices of all ages and all lands. To allure Greece to the arts of peace; to make her the eye of philosophy and the cradle of genius; to lift her above the ordinary plain, to be seen and read of all men, like the Acropolis, with Minerva and her banner above it—may not this have been the deeper thought of the great epical teacher? If in this spirit, and with this key, we approach Homer and Thersites, we best comprehend the muse. To do this, no favors are craved of time. If, indeed, any thing Homeric is original, the original text will answer for all purposes of vindication.

The consentaneous commentary and the general drift of translation confirm my theory; but I place its absolute verity on higher ground. It depends on the inmost life of the poem, which would lose its harmony, if its genius were not a flaming sword of satire, to destroy the worst enemies of Grecian unity and human advancement. Could the man whose mind conceived and whose voice hymned, to the swelling harmony of the voiceful sea, such a grand epic, have meant it only as a tribute to a pack of paltry charlatans, angry thieves, and lascivious tyrants, and as a genealogical tree for the upstarts of such a race?

Were Homer's teachings lost on Greece? This inquiry involves a singular confirmation of my ironic theory, which De Quincey unconsciously gives. There was great rivalry between Sparta and Athens, not only as to leadership in Greece, but as to honoring Homer. What were the motives of each state in re-editing his poems

and consecrating his name? The lawgivers of each state called all its political machinery into play for this purpose—Lycurgus for Sparta, Solon for Athens. The purpose of Lycurgus for Sparta is plain. It had, as the basis, a warlike morality; but, says De Quincey, "strangely enough, from the literary land of Athens and from the later period we do not learn the 'how' and the 'why;' but from the gross illiterate land and the short period, we *do*." Clearly one motive was martial; the other, the opposite. The moral of the "Iliad" for Sparta was that the whole duty of man consisted in fighting; for Athens—well, it was what, when a boy fresh from college, I felt when traversing these seas and lands where Homer ruled "as his demesne." Athens arose under the spell of enchantment, the haunt of Wisdom, Poetry, Oratory, and Art. It became the dome of thought, the palace of the soul. From Homer came Plato and Aristotle; from Plato and Aristotle that language and spirit which, through many vicissitudes, kept alive the literature and genius of our race. Athens triumphs, because she regarded Homer in his best sense; in fact, in an ironic sense, as the teacher of peace, and not the voice of war. Greece herself became illumined with the genius of Athens.

From all climes, pilgrims came to her shrines of genius, and, like our own Everett, found in her desolation the charmed spot where was woven the spell of enchantment. "On this spot was woven the gorgeous web of the 'Odyssey;' from that cliff Sappho threw herself into the sea; on my left hand lie the gardens of Alcinous, and the olive and the grape and the orange still cover the soil; before me rises the embattled citadel which Virgil describes; on my right are the infamous Acroceraunian rocks of Horace; and within that blue mountain

barrier which bounds the horizon were concealed the mystic grove and oracle of Dodona, the cradle of the mythology of Greece."

In the spirit of this epic, as we ironically read it, the Grecian isle of Delos was dedicated to the gods, where no foe could come. All countries here met in absolute peace. Would its temple have been complete without an effigy of Thersites or a statue of Homer? The latter, with his "deep brow" and honest inspiration, and the former, clear-cut, distinct and effective, would have given to the Grecian chisel rare opportunity! The effigy of Thersites would have taught that laughter has its noblest uses when directed against wrong. If the nations now could understand fully what Homer meant when he charged the warrior kings in council—with all the vices, robberies and rapes, treacheries and spites, cruelties and crimes—there would be a vast disarmament in Europe and Asia, and many milliards would be saved annually for the welfare of the workers among men. When Milton wrote of conquests, he made the indictment against the "war worthies" irrefragably strong. The counts were thus summed up: rob, spoil, burn, slaughter, enslave, and ruin. To this indictment the kings of history, from the Greeks down, must plead; and when they plead not guilty, let the prosecution on behalf of the people summon Thersites! His testimony would vindicate not only the great epic muse, but the universal taste for the humors of human life, which are nowhere more welcome or rational than in our own hemisphere.

THE END.

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